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An examination of Geoffrey Parrinder's contribution to the study of religion.

An Examination of Geoffrey Parrinder's Contribution to the Study of Religion.

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Abstract

The Introduction examines why a consideration of Geoffrey Parrinder's contribution to the study of religion is timely.

Chapter 1 examines Parrinder's life and career. Chapter 2 discusses his Christian faith, especially his Methodist heritage, to discern the convictions and assumptions he brings to his attitudes towards and assessments of other faiths. Parrinder has always been an exponent of the comparative method of relating and understanding religious faith and practice, so Chapter 3 locates and describes him as a Christian comparativist.

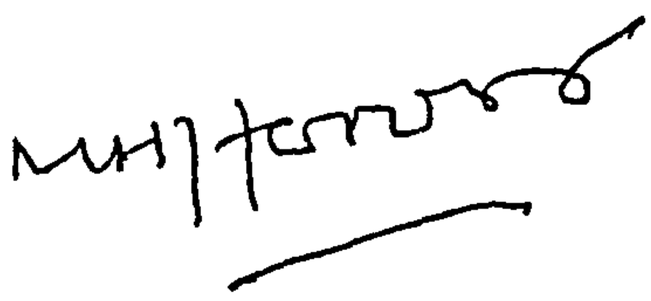
His formative years as a scholar were spent in West Africa. Furthermore, his lasting contribution to the study of religion may well be his work on African primal faith. Chapter 4 assesses this. He first worked in Africa as a Methodist missionary. Many of his lasting interests in Christian faith began there. Chapter 5 looks at these issues. Also in West Africa, he encountered Islam. Chapter 6 examines his work on that religion, and also his much briefer treatment of another 'religion of the book', Judaism.

Chapter 7 interprets his work on South Asian religion as primarily that of a Christian who reads meaning into rather than out of what he describes, and concludes with a reflection upon the weaknesses of the comparative method he espouses. Because he has been a Christian comparativist, the final chapter describes recent attempts by Christian theologians to describe God's presence among people of other faiths, and whether Parrinder's writings might suggest a better way forward than some work done in this area. It closes by comparing him with a contemporary, Lesslie Newbigin, and a younger scholar, Diana Eck. The Conclusion contends that his has been a major contribution to the study of religion, and suggests that the work of other scholars of Religious Studies should be recovered.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Professor Ursula King for her careful and inspiring supervision. Professor Geoffrey Parrinder has cheerfully submitted to interviews, telephone calls and letters. I am very grateful to him, not only for his time and patience, but for his pioneering and exemplary work in the field of Religious Studies.

The work contained in this thesis is entirely my own. It represents my own views, not those of the University of Bristol.



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Introduction

The changes of the recent past have been unprecedented in their scale. The historian Geoffrey Barraclough (b.1908) contends that such things as the impact of technical and scientific advance, the dwarfing of Europe, and the revolt against the West have resulted not only in structural change but also in qualitative difference from the past (Barraclough, 1967: *passim*, especially 9-42). As a result, he argues for the provisional designation 'contemporary history' to replace that of 'modern history' from the beginning of the twentieth century, or at least since 1945.

Political, social and economic transformations have been matched by widespread religious changes. Traditional forms of religious observance or even beliefs may be declining in Western Europe, but in most places religions are undergoing development and renewal. Frank Whaling has observed that:

> Our present age is one of rapid change in which there is the emerging of a global consciousness. The world has lived through climactic events since 1945, not least in the religious sphere:- the coming of a homeland for the Jews, the renaissance of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions... the rise of a new self-confidence within Islam since the time of the oil crisis, the emergence of 'new' religions in Japan, the thousands of African Independent Churches, and new cults in the West... (Whaling, 1987:1)

How convincing is Whaling's account of an emerging global consciousness? The desire of many people to retreat into nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and other 'tribal' responses is all too evident in the modern world. If a

universal vision is evolving, it is due to scholars who have broadened their horizons. Many intellectuals have not done so, including many Western theologians.

Indeed, an explicit and narrow Christian perspective upon other religions has been widely influential among many contemporary British scholars of religions. Yet in the light of the exciting and novel situation Whaling has described, many arguments for the theological superiority of Christianity over other world faiths seem to be parochial and, in a post-imperial setting, condescending. They fail to contextualise Christian faith in our contemporary world, but simply articulate the concerns and prejudices of a bygone era. Ironically, many contemporary Christian theologians of a liberal hue[1] do not seem to be able, even if willing, to look at another's ultimate vision empathetically. Some would deny that such perception is possible.

What, however, of the contributions of scholars who have shaped the relatively new discipline of Religious Studies. Have they attempted to utilise and articulate resources from within the world's religions that will be faithful to the past, yet promote tolerance and fruitful coexistence in an increasingly inter-related though diverse world? Could there emerge a creative interaction between them and theologians or other traditional interpreters of their faiths?

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[1]See Chapter 8.4 passim

The work of some intellectuals on different aspects of Religious Studies has already been examined. For example, Christopher Lamb's Ph.D dissertation[2] is shortly to appear in print as The Call to Retrieval: The Missionary Theology of Kenneth Cragg.[3] Lamb, who is the Secretary for Inter-Faith Relations to the General Synod of the Church of England and the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, analyses the strengths and defects of Cragg's Christian interpretation of Islam and other faiths, but betrays little awareness of the global issues Barraclough and Whaling have discerned as crucially important. Lamb's is a Christian theological critique of his subject's Christian theological methodology. Yet it seems important to locate such figures as Cragg against a less confined background than Christian theology;[4] one which includes theology but notes the historical and other sweeping changes that have faced scholars of Cragg's generation, who bridged the transition from a British imperial system to a

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[2]Birmingham University.

[3]It will be published by I.B. Taurus, London, during 1995.

[4]Kenneth Cragg (b.1913) is renowned for his Christian interpretation of Islam, although he has written more widely. His first and probably best book, The Call of the Minaret, was first published in 1956, ironically the year when French and British forces attempted unsuccessfully to halt the Egyptian government's nationalisation of the Suez canal. Cragg has consistently maintained a charitable yet overtly Christian approach to the world of Islam:

> [The call of the minaret to Muslim prayer] at length must bring the Christian on beyond those areas of conscious otherness into an intimacy of attained interpretation, where Christ is made known to the heart of the muezzin's faith. (Cragg, 1956:ix)

post-imperial global consciousness. It is time, then, for such an assessment of some of these figures to be attempted.

In many ways, Geoffrey Parrinder is the most influential scholar of religions of his generation, long-lived (unlike S.G.F. Brandon and R.C. Zaehner) and a prolific writer. It therefore seems particularly opportune to examine his contribution to the study of religions.

He has ranged widely in the field of Religious Studies, especially but not exclusively among African and Indian religions. He has written many popular works, but also some that are avowedly specialist. One in particular, African Traditional Religion (1954), has shaped the discussion of traditional African faiths for more than a generation.

His teaching has inspired two generations of students, not only British academics like John Hinnells and Ursula King, but also African students who later became church leaders, of whom the most notable is Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Indeed, Parrinder's controversial teaching about Buddhism's implicit theism[5] is echoed in Tutu's foreword to a collection of essays dedicated to Parrinder on the occasion of his 80th birthday.[6] A more impressive legacy has been illustrated by Tutu's involvement with Jews, Hindus,

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[5]See Chapter 7.1.

[6]'Hinduism and Buddhism regard human persons as aspects of the divine if they would but recognise it, destined in the end to be reabsorbed into a higher, transcendent reality'. (Tutu in King, 1990:ix)

Muslims and others in his struggle for the end of apartheid in South Africa. Tutu wrote that:

> [Parrinder] impressed me with his warm generosity of spirit, helping his students to have a broad ecumenism that welcomed the insights of those faiths other than their own. I am grateful for having thus been prepared for the cultural and religious pluralism so characteristic of our times. (in King, 1990:ix)

My own interest in Parrinder's writings arose from reading his works on South Asian religions when I was a student in India from 1975 to 1977. I was impressed by the breadth of his knowledge, and inspired by his charitable attitudes towards other faiths. Yet I also felt that his description of certain Hindu and especially Buddhist interpretations of reality imposes upon them a weight of Christian meaning which they cannot bear, obscuring their central concerns. I met Parrinder for the first time on a conference in 1988 and, like many others, was impressed by his insatiable curiosity, his charm and sense of humour. We are both Methodist ministers, and I decided to examine the roots of his faith, and the scale of his achievements.

I was originally trained as a historian, and one of my primary endeavours has been to examine Parrinder's work from that perspective. One crucial question which has guided my research has been: how far does he reflect or else differ from the assumptions of Methodist and other Christians of his day about the status of other faiths and their members? Another important consideration is whether the comparative method he espouses is ahistorical in

correlating phenomena, ideals and ideas from different religions, geographical areas and even epochs, and thus misleads his students.

Most of all, I explore how far his writings have provided the basis for a global interpretation of the world's religious heritage. Are they parochial, Western and Christian?; or do they contain insights which help others describe ultimate visions for humankind, appropriate for and life-giving to our contemporary situation?

Parrinder has described other religions within a Christian interpretative framework. In his earliest published work, an article for the *Expository Times* published in June 1939, he wrote that:

> Christ is, indeed, the unique thing about Christianity. We may freely rejoice in the fact that God has spoken to men of all races. We rejoice in the good elements of all the great world religions, for they are of God, and are due to his inspiration. But, in Jesus Christ, God Himself has come into this dark world, once for all, and this coming is directed to the salvation of every fallen soul of man. This is the motive of the Christian missionary message, and the motive is no less strong to-day than it has ever been. (Parrinder, 1939:5)

So, from the very beginning of his writing career, Parrinder has been primarily concerned to interpret other faiths sympathetically to a western and Christian audience, whilst remaining deeply committed to the uniqueness of Christ.[7] Half a century later, Parrinder wrote that this

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[7]The *Expository Times*, for which Parrinder wrote, was founded in 1889 as a monthly journal for Christians, particularly aimed at clergymen and preachers to help them

article 'seems to be on the right lines, though I would now express some of it differently'.[8]

Yet although he was a missionary for most of the years from 1933 to 1946, his Methodist roots reveal him to be quite a different scholar than, for example, Lesslie Newbigin.[9] The Methodist tradition of Christian faith has centrally been 'an Arminianism of the heart' (Nuttall, 1967:78) and has, at its most authentic, been deeply suspicious of the Calvinism which shaped the thought of the giant figure of 20th Century Protestant Theology, Karl Barth (1886-1968), and his disciples.[10] Parrinder's work provides a necessary corrective to their dominance, especially for a religiously plural world of which Barth had no experience[11] and for which many of his followers, such as Hendrik Kraemer and Newbigin, had no empathy. It also indicates that global perspectives, or at least attitudes which confer meaning upon or discern significance within other faiths, arise

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in the exposition of Christian faith.

[8]In a letter dated 31/7/89.

[9]Newbigin was confirmed into the English Presbyterian Church (which is now part of the United Reformed Church), and later became a bishop in the Church of South India. See Chapter 8.4., where his interpretation of other faiths is contrasted with Parrinder's.

[10]See Chapter 2, *passim*; especially 2.5 and 2.6.

[11]'D.T. Niles of Sri Lanka met Karl Barth for the first time in 1935. In the course of conversation Barth said, "Other religions are just unbelief". Niles asked, "How many Hindus, Dr Barth, have you met?" Barth answered, "None". Niles said, "How then do you know that Hinduism is unbelief?" Barth replied, "*A priori*". Niles concluded, "I simply shook my head and smiled"'. Quoted in Cracknell, 1986:120.

from particularities such as a scholar's denomination, nationality and language, not independently of them.

The major primary sources for this thesis, apart from Parrinder's own works, have been one major interview with him and another shorter one, and letters received from him. The secondary sources have been many and varied. Most important among them are writings of people who have influenced him, or whose works help set him in the context of his times.

Chapter 1 explores Parrinder's early life, and examines the influences which led him to his convictions. It then offers a summary of his life and achievements since, to provide a background against which material in later chapters can be viewed and interpreted. Finally, it investigates his credentials as a populariser of Religious Studies. Chapter 2 discusses Parrinder's Christian faith, and especially his Methodist heritage, to discern the convictions and assumptions he brings to his attitudes towards and assessments of other faiths. He has always been an exponent of the comparative method of relating and understanding religious faith and practice, so Chapter 3 locates and describes him as a Christian comparativist. His formative years as a scholar were spent in West Africa. Furthermore, his major contribution to the study of religion may prove to be his work on African primal faith. Chapter 4 assesses this.

Chapter 5 looks at Parrinder's Christian explorations of certain practices sanctioned by religion, which were first raised for him as a missionary in West Africa. There, he also encountered Islam. Chapter 6 examines his work on that religion, and his much briefer treatment of another 'religion of the book', Judaism.

Chapter 7 interprets his work on South Asian religion as primarily that of a Christian who reads meaning into rather than out of what he describes. It concludes with a reflection upon the weaknesses and strengths of the comparative method he espouses, which is most clearly illustrated by his work on Indian religions.

Because Parrinder has been a Christian comparativist, the final chapter describes recent attempts by Christian theologians to describe the possibility and modes of God's presence among other faiths, and their implications for Parrinder's own writings. In order to focus more clearly his achievements as a Christian scholar of other faiths, it ends by comparing him with a contemporary, Lesslie Newbigin, and a younger scholar, Diana Eck (b.1945). The conclusion evaluates his contribution to Religious Studies. In particular, it assesses how far, if at all, he has contributed to the emerging global consciousness described by Whaling and Barraclough.

1. Parrinder's Life and Career

1.1 Early Life: 1910-1933.[12]

Edward Geoffrey Simons Parrinder was born in New Barnet, Hertfordshire, on 30 April 1910 to William Patrick and Florence Mary. In 1919 his parents moved to Leigh-on-Sea where he spent the rest of his childhood. He was educated at a private school there, Leigh Hall College. His father worked for glove firms in the City of London, and eventually had his own one-man business, which went bankrupt in the financial crisis of 1930.

He came from a practising Wesleyan Methodist family. His father had wanted to be a Methodist minister and a missionary to Africa, but was persuaded otherwise by his parents. Geoffrey wrote that 'I only knew this many years later but he must have passed his feelings on to me unconsciously'. His own vocation to Christian ministry came early in life:

> Geoffrey... 'bottled up' his own sense of vocation until he was fourteen! Then one day in the snow, as he was pushing his mother in her wheel chair, he told her of his ambition. (Ainger, 1995:29)

The family's religious ethos was liberal and tolerant. Geoffrey's mother, who had suffered from ill-health for

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[12]Much of the information in this section and, indeed, the chapter as a whole was given in personal interviews conducted by the author, and by letters received from Parrinder.

years,[13] had a young friend called Katie Hunt, a masseuse who was ill and came to stay with the family when told that she had only six months to live. She stayed thirty years and, through her brother Ernest, drew the young Geoffrey into an interest in and appreciation of the world of religions and particularly of Buddhism.

As a young man, Ernest had sampled a variety of religious experiences, starting with the Church of England and then venturing into Methodism, the Salvation Army and Roman Catholicism. Before the Great War of 1914 to 1918, he went abroad on business, fell ill in Hawaii, was cared for by a Buddhist family, married their daughter and became a Buddhist. His commitment to religious pluralism never faltered: after his wife's death, he married an English Quaker, but himself remained a Buddhist with the name of 'Shinkaku', meaning 'new word'. He and his second wife obtained governmental recognition for Buddhist schools in Hawaii, which they founded and developed. As late as 1964, Parrinder and his wife visited the Hunts in Honolulu, where Ernest was a priest at a Soto[14] Zen temple.

Ernest often wrote to Katie, who brought stories about him into the Parrinder household, along with books on Buddhism which she had absorbed into her Christianity. Geoffrey remembers that 'in particular there was a Life of the

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[13]Even so, she lived to be over 90 years old.

[14]Diacritical marks have usually been omitted throughout the thesis, to simplify the text.

Buddha [by Mrs Adams Beck[15]] which had attractive pictures and opened a different world of ideas' (Parrinder, 1987a:6). Initially, Hunt's family were shocked by his conversion. When he made a short trip home after his conversion, they thought he would observe food taboos or demand only vegetarian food but in fact he ate everything, on the grounds that the Buddhist prohibition was against taking life oneself rather than against eating meat (Parrinder, 1987a:5f.). Thus did the young Geoffrey come to an early appreciation of the distinction between book knowledge of another religion and experiencing it through observing or hearing about what its practitioners actually did.

Parrinder left school at sixteen, and worked as a booking clerk at Leigh-on-Sea station for 2½ years. During this time he qualified as a local preacher. Then, between 1929 and 1932, Parrinder trained for the Wesleyan Methodist ministry at Richmond College in South London. Methodist union was accomplished during those years so he has spent his entire ministry within the united Church.[16] His time at Richmond College was influential upon him in three ways: he had a growing awareness of Indian spirituality; he was taught a liberal rather than conservative or neo-Barthian theology; and he offered himself for missionary service.

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[15]First published in 1926 as The Splendour of Asia.

[16]He became a supernumary minister (which is Methodist parlance, meaning that he became a retired clergyman) in 1972, though he taught for five more years at Kings College, London.

He remembers that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), the *mahatma* or 'great soul' of modern India, visited England at this time (Parrinder, 1994b:66). In fact, Gandhi arrived on 12 September 1931 as the Indian National Congress Party's representative at the Round Table Conference, discussions about the extent of further devolution of power to Indians in British India. That visit, and particularly Gandhi's insistence upon staying with the poor in the East End of London, made a powerful impression on Parrinder, as it did on many contemporary Englishmen. Here was a Hindu, reverenced as almost godlike by many people, who was sympathetic to and knowledgable about Christianity, but who nevertheless remained a Hindu. Parrinder was also aware of the close friendship between Gandhi and Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940). Andrews had resigned his missionary post in 1914 (he had gone to Delhi in 1904 under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) and had also declared that he was no longer an Anglican clergyman (Tinker, 1979:95ff.), but he always remained a convinced Christian. Thereafter, he was closely involved in the movement for Indian independence. Although many years later Geoffrey recorded that 'the thirties were a time of growing anti-imperialism',[17] this observation may be the fruit of hindsight. Certainly, he was never to be involved in the political struggle for freedom and justice in West Africa

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[17]In a letter dated 8/1/90.

or elsewhere.[18] His was an appreciation of Gandhi and Andrews as charismatic religious figures rather than as ones for whom religion and politics were inter-related and mutually inspirational.

During his Richmond days, Parrinder read and admired A.J. Appasamy's Temple Bells, an anthology of Hindu and Sikh religious literature first published in 1930 (Parrinder, 1994b:66). Appasamy was an Indian Christian, who was appreciative of his country's religious heritage. He wrote that 'Jesus came to fulfil, not to destroy' (Appasamy, 1930:viii), sentiments which struck a chord in Parrinder's heart and mind, though he came to see the drawbacks of a fulfilment theology.[19] At this stage of his life, India spirituality rather than African was important for his religious formation.

The second influence of his Richmond days upon him was that there he freely imbibed liberal theology. He particularly remembers that he was taught comparative religion and theology by Eric Waterhouse, who was Professor of the Philosophy of Religion in the University of London. On the wall of his study hung a portrait of J.H. Moulton who had written books on Zoroastrianism, including Treasures of the Magi. Its sympathetic title indicated the broad attitude that Waterhouse and other tutors had towards other religions. Moulton's book had been published in 1917 in the

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[18]See Chapter 3.3.

[19]See Chapter 8.2.

series "The Religious Quest of India". Parrinder's copy was given to him by Moulton's brother. In it was a cutting from an Indian newspaper in 1916, which recorded a meeting Moulton spoke to in India. There, he addressed a group of seventy leading Hindus, Parsis and Muslims. At the end, members of his audience told him that '"if only we speak of their religion with sympathy and without denunciation and scorn, we can set forth our own without fear of their resentment"' (Parrinder, 1994b:65; quoting *The Methodist Recorder*, 19/10/1916). Parrinder recalls that 'the tradition of Moulton remained in my college and lectures reflected his informed and tolerant approach to other religions' (Parrinder, 1994b:65). These were the days before the vogue of neo-Barthianism extended from mainland Europe to British theological waters.

In Waterhouse's book What Is Salvation?, published while Parrinder was one of his students, he argued that characteristic ways of thought in India must 'be baptised with the spirit of Jesus and transformed. Yet even after they have been transformed they will be Indian, not Western' (Waterhouse, 1932:106). Waterhouse was even prepared to countenance as Christian the Indian belief in reincarnation:

> Plato held such views without any impiety or detriment to his character, and if these views raise philosophical difficulties, they also explain some things, and have distinctly a moral significance. (Waterhouse, 1932:104)

Parrinder himself has never accepted reincarnation as a Christian belief, but as late as 1987, perhaps remembering his old teacher's views, he noted that Plato had approved it (Parrinder, 1987a:54). More important is his recollection that the line taken by Waterhouse was that, although Christianity provided a special revelation of God, there was a general revelation open to all people. Parrinder was to echo this view in his earliest academic article.[20]

Although in those days Richmond College was a bastion of liberal theology, it had a name for training missionaries. Every year about one third of its students went to work overseas. In 1930, a representative of the Methodist Missionary Society came to the college to encourage its students to serve abroad. At that time, there was a special need for Methodist missionaries in French West Africa, and Parrinder responded to a request to work there. A French student at Richmond College named Scarabin, whose father was a minister in Brittany, persuaded him that he should improve his French, and encouraged him to apply to a Protestant college in France for the last year of his ministerial training. He wrote to all three such colleges, at Paris, Strasbourg and Montpellier, and the last gave him a bursary for one year, which covered the cost of lodging and lectures.

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[20]See Chapter 2.2.

Before he left for the Faculté Libre de Théologie Protestante, Montpellier University, Parrinder obtained the Diploma in Theology of London University. He had not been taught Latin at school, which was a requirement for qualifying for London degrees. Thus he was not able to read for a London University Bachelor of Divinity degree as some Richmond College students did, although many of the courses were the same for both degree and diploma.

Parrinder read widely whilst he was in Montpellier, including Calvin's Institutes. He was not impressed by Calvin and his twentieth century spiritual heirs, Barth and Kraemer, and has remained a critic of their position (eg Parrinder, 1977a:47f; and Chapter 2 below). He also wrote a book which he sent to SCM Press, who turned it down, though with appreciation.[21] It was not his first attempt to get a publisher to print his work. As a child he wrote poetry but could not get it published.

The French college Parrinder attended was evangelical in ethos. Although he was not an evangelical, he rarely felt out of place. Characteristically, he learned from what he observed. After he went to preach his first French sermon at a Methodist Church in the Cevennes, he was taken aback when the pastor took him to see boys playing football on a Sunday afternoon, a practice frowned upon even by liberal

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[21]Parrinder cannot now remember the subject matter of the book.

Methodists in Britain of the 1930s. Thereafter, the pastor took him to meet some of his colleagues. Parrinder recalls:

> One of them went on about the decline of standards of the Methodist Conference[22] in England, because it seemed that at Conference there was a smoking room. Didn't I think that it was a sin for a minister to smoke? I pointed out that on the table there was a bottle of wine, and English Methodists thought it was a sin to drink wine. He replied, 'Que voulez-vous? All my members work in the vineyards'. This gave me a new understanding of social conditioning of the church.[23]

Parrinder's year in France was a time of separation from his fiancée, Esther Mary Burt of Maidford, near Towcester, a farmer's daughter. Mary and Geoffrey still have the farm and cottage, set in eighteen acres in Maidford, which her parents and aunt owned. Mary used to be called Esther. Characteristically droll, Geoffrey claims to have taken his wife from the Old Testament to the New, by calling her Mary rather than Esther. They first met at King's Cross Central Methodist Mission in 1930, where Geoffrey went to preach on occasional Sundays from Richmond. Mary regularly worshipped there when she was a nurse at the Royal Free Hospital on Grey's Inn Road in London. Part of their attraction for each other was a common interest in Africa as Mary was thinking of going there to work.

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[22]The annual governing body of the British Methodist Church, which meets over more than a week at the end of June.

[23]In a letter dated 22/1/90.

1.2 His missionary career: 1933-1946.

Parrinder arrived in Porto Novo, Dahomey (now Benin) in 1933. He was without Mary because, in those days, British Methodism prescribed a seven year engagement for its ordinands. He taught at the Séminaire Protestant there from September to December that year, and then at the Séminaire Protestant, Dabou, Ivory Coast, where he was principal, from January to December 1934. His students at both places were mainly catechists, and he taught mostly biblical studies, with some French. (Although the medium of instruction in elementary schools in both countries was French, the students' mother-tongues were not, and their French sometimes needed improving.)

From January 1935 to February 1936 he was superintendent minister of the Grand Lahou Methodist Circuit in the Ivory Coast (before he was ordained, which took place whilst he was on furlough in England in 1936). During his superintendency Parrinder was primarily a pastor, travelling around in a boat called *L'Evangéliste* with an interpreter named after the god Tano, creator and river God of the Ashanti people of Ghana (then the Gold Coast) and the eastern Ivory Coast (Parrinder, 1949:4,56f.). This man, Victor Tano, had in 1913 acted as interpreter for the Grebo prophet in Liberia, William Wadé Harris, who, as he travelled through the Ivory Coast 'is said to have baptised 120,000 people before being deported by the French colonial government which suspected sedition, especially as he was

not ordained and preached in English' (Parrinder, 1987a:151). Even today the independent Harrist Church numbers about 200,000 members or affiliates. Early on, therefore, Parrinder was aware of the issue of African independent churches and the relationship between them and the missionary churches.[24]

At this time Parrinder began work on a London Bachelor of Arts degree, at the instigation of Ernest Taylor, his colleague at the séminaire in Porto Novo. He was unable to enrol for an external London Bachelor of Divinity degree, as Taylor had wanted him to, because he had no Latin or Hebrew. So he studied instead for a B.A. in French, English and Ethics. He sat intermediates when in England in 1936.

However, the highlight of his furlough that year was his marriage to Mary on 25 July. He was allowed to marry her a little earlier than was usually permitted to Methodist ministers, so that they could return together to Porto Novo shortly thereafter. He spent three months in circuit work, and then three years as principal of the séminaire there, interrupted by a short furlough in 1938 after the birth of their first child, Catharine,[25] when he sat the finals of his B.A. and gained his degree. By then the requirement of Latin to do the B.D. had been dropped and Parrinder had taught himself Hebrew, so he sat the B.D. finals after his

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[24]See Chapter 5.2.

[25]Two more children were born to them: Philip in 1940 (d.1994), and Stephen in 1947.

return to England in 1940, which he obtained with first class honours.

Mary and Geoffrey had returned to England on furlough early in 1940, just before the occupation of France by German forces. With the establishment of Vichy rule in France and her colonies they were unable to return to French West Africa, and so accepted a circuit appointment in Redruth, Cornwall, from 1940 to 1943.

In 1943 it became possible for Geoffrey to return alone to Dahomey and, at the request of the Methodist Missionary Society, he did so. From September that year until January 1945 he was a minister in the Dassa Zoumé circuit, and was then principal once more of the séminaire in Porto Novo until February 1946, when he returned to England.

Whilst Geoffrey and Mary were in Redruth, Ernest Taylor died, an event which was to have a profound effect upon Parrinder. After 1940, when the Vichy government was installed in Dahomey, Taylor could not return to England. He was permitted to continue the work of the séminaire. One Sunday, when he had gone to Cotonou to preach, two French sailors asked him to point the way to Nigeria. They were on the run, and probably hoped to join the Free French movement, but it is uncertain whether Taylor knew this. They were caught at the border and implicated him in their attempted flight. He was arrested by the police but given one day's notice to sort out affairs at the séminaire. An African colleague offered to help him escape, which was

easily possible through the bush to Nigeria, but he refused. Perhaps he had given his word to return to custody, or maybe he considered there would be reprisals against the séminaire and his colleagues if he took that course. He was taken to Dakar in Senegal, tried and sentenced to a fine of 20,000 francs and five years imprisonment, after which he was to be deported from French territories. But death intervened on 17th April 1942, of malaria and dysentery.

In his will Taylor left about a dozen books on African religion to Parrinder, who read them after his return to Dahomey in 1943. Among them was Captain R.S. (Robert Sutherland) Rattray's great work Ashanti (1923), on the Ashanti people of the Gold Coast (now Ghana), where Rattray had been a member of the Gold Coast Political Service, and thereafter first Head of the Anthropological Department in Ashanti.

Parrinder's interest in indigenous African religions was not newly acquired in 1943. He had discussed African religions with Taylor when they were colleagues in Porto Novo. On the boat trip home in 1936, he first met, conversed and played tennis with Margaret Field. He did not know then that she had recently finished her major work on Religion and Medicine of the Ga People [of Accra] (1937), but kept in touch with her and referred to her book a lot in his later West African Religion. Moreover, he had from his earliest days in Africa been intrigued by the religious

practices he encountered, and was disinclined to dismiss them as heathenish practices in the manner of many missionaries (Parrinder, 1989a:266ff.). His earliest article for the *Expository Times* does not mention African indigenous religion, but its willingness to recognise God's presence in non-Christian religions no doubt arose to some extent from his observations of African faith around him.

However, Taylor's death and legacy encouraged, indeed inspired, him to explore in detail West African indigenous religion. Moreover, Mary's absence in England gave him time to travel and research. So the years from 1943 to 1946 formed the time when his curiosity about West African religion, appreciation of its achievements and relationships with other interested people were buttressed by serious reading, practical research, and considered writing.

Moreover, Parrinder was blossoming as a scholar, and without any supervision or guidance. Certainly, Parrinder enjoyed the discipline of scholarly research and writing. Perhaps it seemed particularly appropriate to him to translate his research on African religion into a postgraduate qualification, as a fitting tribute to Taylor, who had first persuaded him to acquire academic qualifications.

When he immersed himself in West African religion, a useful contact was a French administrator, M. Edouard Dunglas, whom Parrinder came to know when he was in Dassa. Dunglas

provided Parrinder with contacts among Africans who talked with him about their history, also of their traditional and religious practices. Dunglas had previously been stationed in Kétu, once an ancient Yoruba kingdom, and had at that time sketched an account, 'Légendes et Histoires du Royaume de Kétou', which languished in typescript in the archives of the Central Government of Dahomey at Porto Novo. Parrinder and Dunglas revised and augmented this draft as they travelled together in central Dahomey, visiting old towns and talking to Africans, and Parrinder prepared an English translation. Later Dunglas moved away and was collecting material for a history of the whole colony when he died in November 1952. Some years later Parrinder looked over the notes he had taken, thoroughly revised them, and published The Story of Kétu in 1956 (Parrinder, 1956a:3).

Parrinder's missionary years ended in 1946. Later chapters of this thesis will explore how much his interpretations of other faiths than his own have been refracted through a specifically Christian and missionary prism. Here, two points must be made about his missionary experience. First, his years in Francophone West Africa gave him time to develop as a scholar. Not only did he acquire the basic tools of the scholarly trade, in the form of three degrees, undergraduate and postgraduate. Also, his instincts were those of openness to different beliefs and practices and inquisitiveness about them. In this, he sharply differed from many other missionaries, though not from all, since some were as enlightened as his friend and colleague,

Ernest Taylor. Secondly, like many missionaries, he exercised far more authority and power than did many ministers in England. Although the two seminaries in which he taught were little more than centres of basic adult education, it is remarkable that he was principal of one of them and a superintendent minister even before he was ordained. In England, Methodist ministers would not then have become superintendents or principals of theological colleges before they had done at least twenty years service. In some missionaries, such responsibilities confirmed in them a sense of racial superiority and a false sense of their own academic, pastoral or administrative competence, but nobody has claimed this of Parrinder, nor could they credibly do so. In his case, he acquired confidence in his own skills, not least in his academic prowess, since he had no formal supervision for his postgraduate work:

> He... decided to write a comparative study of African religion in the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, in Dahomey, and in Nigeria [also in Togo, cf Parrinder, 1949:3]. He eventually typed this up, gave it the title *West African Religion*, and brought it home with him in 1943 [sic for 1946]. He duly submitted this for his London Ph.D. (Ainger, 1995:31)

It may be unfortunate that Parrinder had no formal supervision. His formidable powers of observation and description might otherwise have gained an analytic edge which is missing from much of his work. What has never been in doubt is his pastoral sensitivity and his recognition of his indebtedness to others: many years after Taylor's

death, Parrinder unsuccessfully tried to find his tomb when he was in Senegal; and he has said of Taylor that 'if he had lived, he would have become one of the leading scholars of Methodism' (Ainger, 1995:30).

1.3 Guernsey: 1946-1949.

From September 1946 to August 1949, Parrinder was a minister of the Guernsey French circuit in the Channel Isles. His London University Ph.D was awarded in 1946 soon after his return from Dahomey, and his examiners were Edwin Oliver James (1888-1972), who was Professor of the History of Religion in the University of London, and Edwin William (or, Williams) Smith (1876-1957). The latter wrote a foreword in September 1947 to its appearance as West African Religion; publication was, however, delayed until 1949. On one occasion, shortly after Parrinder was awarded his doctorate, Smith took him to lunch at the Royal Commonwealth Society. There, in reminiscent mood, Smith berated the strategy of the Primitive Methodist Church in sending European workers to Africa. He told Parrinder that such missionaries would never make any headway in Africa until they learned the language and religion of the people among whom they lived and worked.[26]

While at Guernsey, Parrinder studied for and earned London degrees of Master of Arts and Master of Theology in the

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[26]Smith's point that only by acquiring a person's language can another come to understand him or her, is made with evocative power in his book (1929) The Shrine of a People's Soul.

history and philosophy of religion.[27] He also began to publish. The major fruit of his labour at this time was West African Psychology (1951). He also wrote a chapter on 'Theistic Beliefs of the Yoruba and Ewe Peoples of West Africa' for Edwin Smith's symposium (1950) African Ideas of God (Parrinder, 1950b:224-240).

Although pastoral ministry was not to be his métier after 1949 (in terms of gainful employment, that is; more recently, for years he has run a bible study class in his local church in Orpington and contributed regular reflections to its newsletter), his pastoral work in Africa and Britain in the 1930s and 1940s must not be overlooked, since colleagues have written and spoken warmly of his generosity of spirit, warm friendship, and sensitivity to the views of others (eg in King, 1990:ix, 6). These characteristics go some way towards explaining the importance and popularity of his writings. Two works on pastoral matters were published whilst he was at Guernsey but had been written earlier. He composed Learning to Pray (1949) while he was at Redruth; it was based on preparation material given to young people. His foreword to a compilation of Charles Wesley's hymns, Devotions to the Passion (1947), was a selection particularly suitable for

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[27]These degrees were studied and gained after Parrinder had been awarded his Ph.D In an interview on 6/7/90, Parrinder wryly commented that he thought he should 'tidy up' his academic qualifications before proceeding to the final degree of Doctor of Divinity, about which the text later in this chapter gives information.

use in Holy Week and for preparation for Holy Communion, and had been collected whilst he was in Dassa.

In 1949 the Parrinders left Guernsey; in those days Methodist ministers in Britain usually served only three years in a particular place. Geoffrey was offered another church appointment in Ilford, Essex, but he never took it up. Instead, he applied for two teaching posts in West Africa. He was interviewed in London by, among others, the two principals of University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, and of the university at Légon in the (then) Gold Coast. The authorities at Légon wanted to create an Oxbridge type of university with a traditional Theology degree course, and the appointment went to someone else. Ibadan was a secular foundation and at first the authorities had no idea of creating a chapel or a theological degree course. Indeed, the principal, Kenneth Mellanby, who had not realised the strength of religion in West Africa, told Parrinder later that he thought there was no place for Theology or Mission Studies in such an institution, but had changed his mind when he found that without the mission schools to provide students there would have been no university. Indeed, local pressure made him consider founding a course in Religious Studies, to include African religion, Christianity and Islam. At his interview, Parrinder was asked if he would like to be involved in creating such a course. His book West African Religion had just been published and was on the table before the interviewing panel. He replied that he thought some new kind of degree could be worked out. In the

end, he was not appointed to the chair, for which he had applied, but was offered and accepted the position as lecturer in the new subject of Religious Studies. (He became Senior Lecturer in 1950, a post he held until he returned from Africa to London in 1958.)

1.4 Ibadan: 1949-1958.

The Parrinders arrived in Ibadan in 1949, a year before teaching began in 1950 with the arrival of Geoffrey's colleague and the new professor, James Welch. Geoffrey was academically better qualified than Welch, who had worked for the BBC.[28] However, it was perhaps fortuitous that Parrinder was not appointed to the post for which he had applied, because his task was not primarily to teach Christianity; instead, he began his pioneering work as a teacher of Religious Studies.[29]

Parrinder used the year before Welch came to work out a three subject course, part of the London B.A. degree, which had nine papers. The topics were Old Testament, New Testament and African traditional religion. Welch taught New Testament studies, whilst Parrinder taught the other two subjects. There was theoretical provision for Islam also, but there were no Muslim students at first, and, indeed, very few from the north of Nigeria, where Islam was

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[28]He had worked with Dorothy Sayers on the famous radio production A Man Born to be King.

[29]When Welch retired in 1954, Parrinder applied, again unsuccessfully, for the chair of the department, which went to Alan Galloway.

numerically strong. Relatively few Muslims were educated in English, which was one reason why not many enrolled in Ibadan. In Parrinder's last year, the Religious Studies department, in order to rectify this significant omission, enrolled seven Muslims on the course, although their educational qualifications were significantly lower than those of the other students, the majority of whom were children of African clergy of various denominations. Most students had been to English-medium Christian schools, and took a general degree at University College, Ibadan, which necessitated them taking three areas of study. Those who read Religious Studies usually chose their two other study areas from English, History and Geography.

It was not just the title of the study of African primal faith that was new, 'African traditional religion', (although what that conveyed had enormous implications for the future studies of African religion, as we shall see in Chapter 4). Rather, the very concept of a department of Religious Studies was something innovatory. Andrew Walls has written that:

> Departments of Religious Studies as we know them in Britain were born in West Africa, the product of the conditions of a plural society where religion is a massive, unignorable, fact of life. And Geoffrey Parrinder found himself teaching what no-one had ever taught him - what, perhaps no-one had ever taught at university level before: a course in Indigenous Religious Beliefs of West Africa. (in King and Walls, 1980:144)

With the encouragement of Mellanby, Parrinder used his spare time during his first year at Ibadan investigating

the religious variety of the city (Parrinder, 1953:5). His research was published as a book, Religion in an African City (1953), which gained him his London University D.D. This book concluded his determined effort to gain academic honours. Perhaps his determination was all the greater because he had left theological college without a university degree. This publication also demonstrates his commitment to practical research. He met and talked with people, recording their beliefs, stories and impressions in an objective way. Although he had five part-time African assistants (which is itself an illustration of his capacity to avoid the racism of many missionaries and anthropologists of his day), he himself 'tramped many miles in the back streets and slums' of Ibadan to garner information for his book (Parrinder, 1953:5). After 1955, Maurice Wiles joined the Religious Studies Department as the third member of staff, and he remembers Parrinder's commitment to practical research:

> When the rest of us were taking a well-earned siesta..., Geoffrey was sometimes to be seen setting off, immaculately turned out in white shirt and shorts, with those characteristically long strides, quick but un-hurried, for the city of Ibadan. This was one of the ways in which he built up his wide knowledge of contemporary African religious practice, reflected particularly in his *Religion in an African City*. It is an indication too of the strong sense of dedication and persistence that lies behind the remarkable achievement of working his way through the whole gamut of academic degree from BA to DD while doing full time pastoral or academic work, mostly in West Africa. (in King, 1990:7)

A significant number of books and articles flowed from Geoffrey's pen during his Ibadan years. Most of them were

on African subjects. The final one, however, was not. An Introduction to Asian Religions came out in 1957 when he was looking for a new job. It resulted in part from a visit to India, Pakistan, Burma (now, Myanmar) and Ceylon (now, Sri Lanka) in 1956. This was made possible by a six month sabbatical from duties in Ibadan, and by a grant of £800 from the Carnegie Trust to visit departments of African Studies in East and South Africa; it was extended to cover South Asia because there was a department in Delhi. This book picked up an interest in Asian religions that reached back to Parrinder's childhood and college days. But it was also a means of persuading others that he was not just a scholar of African religions, but was immersed in the study of and able to teach a number of religions.

E.O. James urged Parrinder to apply for the new post of Reader in the Comparative Study of Religions at the University of London when it was advertised in 1958. James was on the appointing panel, and Parrinder got the job. He left Africa, having worked there for the greater part of a quarter of a century. His interest in African traditional religions was not to cease, nor his publications on aspects of it. Increasingly, however, his research and writings were to turn eastward, especially to India, so that by 1975 Eric Sharpe could designate him both as an 'Africanist and Indologist..., one of the most effective and prolific writers in the field' (Sharpe, 1975:288). However, to call him an Indologist is to inflate both his aims and

achievements.[30] Certainly, it was his sojourns in three different areas of West Africa which formed him as a scholar. Most of his views, shaped there, have developed very little.

1.5 London University: 1958-1977.

Parrinder's academic post was based at King's College, where he taught until his retirement in 1977. In 1970 he was given a personal chair, and from 1970 to 1974 was Dean of the College's Faculty of Theology.

When he arrived, the university's courses in comparative religion ranged too widely in his opinion, taking in, among other faiths, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism and Buddhism, all the subject of one examination paper. He thought it better to study two religions in some depth. So once again he was responsible for putting together a new curriculum. With some prescience, he chose Islam and Hinduism as essential components of the new course. People from the British Empire or Commonwealth were arriving in relatively large numbers in Britain, including many from South Asia, and thus Islam and Hinduism were to become important factors in British society during Parrinder's years at King's College. There was also the conviction in his mind that Islam has close links with Christianity and is therefore a useful launching pad for the study of other

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[30] Introduction to Chapter 7.

faiths, and that Hinduism is a basic requirement for the study of Buddhism and other Indian religions.

It may be that at the beginning of his time there, a 'conventional theological atmosphere... then pervaded Kings College, London' (Hinnells in King, 1990:4), but the contents of Parrinder's course anticipated some of the striking changes that were to take place from the late 1960s onwards in universities like Manchester and Leeds, where the teaching of Christian theology was expanded to include Religious Studies, or Lancaster where, in 1967, a Department of Religious Studies was set up where no provision for the teaching of Christian theology had previously been made. Indeed, Marcus Braybrooke, writing about the relatively recent spread of the study of world religions in British universities, has observed that:

> Particular mention may be made of the Lancaster Centre for the Study of Religion..., and of the influence of Professor E.G. Parrinder at King's College, London. (Braybrooke, 1992:289)

Of the two major components of his new course, Parrinder had encountered Islam in West Africa, where it was the largest religion in Dahomey and the part of western Nigeria where he had lived. He had already written about it in various works, and whilst in Ibadan developed an interest in writing a book about Muslim views of Jesus, which was finally to see the light of day in 1965 as Jesus in the Quran.

However it was Hinduism and not Islam which took up most of his time and energy during the years he taught in London. Early on he went to the School of Oriental and African Studies to learn Sanskrit, so that he could immerse himself in Indian sacred texts and scholarly writings. In 1974 he published a verse translation of the Bhagavad Gita, to popularise that classic and help readers memorise its important verses.

His interest in African religion did not wane. He was a founder-member of the editorial board of the Journal of Religion in Africa, which began publication in 1967 (as he was of the journal Religious Studies from October 1965[31]).

Parrinder has been an influential teacher, as his time at King's College illustrates. Former university students there recall him with a pleasure not always afforded to pedagogues. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whom Parrinder helped supervise for the MTh degree, writes of him 'helping his students to have a broad ecumenism that welcomed the insights of those of faiths other than their own' (in King, 1990:ix). John Hinnells, whose original training and teaching was in the visual arts, was Professor of Comparative Religion at Manchester University when he wrote that:

> To be frank, my own motivation for studying the subject [of Comparative Religion] was no more honourable than timetable convenience. But the quality

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[31]He contributed an article to the first edition of *Religious Studies*; viz. Parrinder, 1965b:109-118.

> of the teaching, the evident fascination for the religions, the interest and feelings evinced by the man, his obvious dedication to the subject, proved infectious and resulted in me, like many others, pursuing the subject further, many of us for the rest of our lives. (in King, 1990:4f.)

This warm tribute, written for a book presented to Parrinder on the occasion of his 80th birthday, indicates that whether or not he has achieved an intellectually fully satisfactory solution to the issues he has addressed, he is a good example of someone whose personal appropriation of his religious vision has had a compelling power. Indeed, Hinnells concluded his tribute:

> To see what a person is like, it is important to observe what happens around him or her. Around Geoffrey there is a wide circle of warm friendships, active study, a sensitivity to the views of others, a compassion and at all times a lively, invigoration[sic] interest. (in King, 1990:6)

If one important part of Parrinder's influence as a teacher was his personal inspiration upon those whom he taught, another was his achievements, through his books, as a populariser of Religious Studies. He became involved in the education of schoolchildren, not directly as their teacher, but indirectly through writing popular textbooks. What Religions Teach, first published in 1963, was aimed at, among other groups, sixth form school students (Parrinder, 1968a:5). A Book of World Religions, first published in 1965, 'aims at providing information about the religions of the modern world' (Parrinder, 1965a:9). Although it does not specify a target audience, its format and contents indicate that it was written for (what were then) '0' level

syllabuses. In 1973, he produced a series of four books, entitled Themes for Living, on the subject of 'Man and God', 'Right and Wrong', 'Society' and 'Goal of Life'. Basically, these comprise passages from writings of religions of the world on aspects of these topics. They were written 'to illustrate some of the major themes and principles of moral living' and the author expressed the hope that they would 'be helpful in moral and religious education, school and college assemblies, in class study and for private interest' (Parrinder, 1973a:7f.). W. Owen Cole, the author of an influential school textbook on world religions,[32] observed that:

> In schools, material from his pioneering *Book of World Religions*... and extracts from his four anthologies *Themes for Living*... have been widely used. His *Worship in the World's Religions*..., is a book which might be ripe for reconsideration in the school worship context. (in King, 1990:117)

In What World Religions Teach, Parrinder noted that 'Everybody is brought up in some religious environment. For most readers of this book it will be Christianity or Judaism'. (Parrinder, 1968a:192). The assertion was probably over-confident in the 1960s, and certainly seems so now in contemporary Britain, where secularism is probably the *de facto* established belief of many people,

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[32]First published in 1981 as Five Religions in the Twentieth Century, London, Hulton.

and in which there is much religious pluralism, with many more Muslims and Hindus than Jews.[33]

In the field of religious education, the Shap Working Party on World Religions has been the organisation which has done most, at school level, to recognise the increasingly multi-faith nature of British society. It:

> brings together a group of around 35 teachers and scholars from all levels of education to encourage accurate and sensitive treatment of religions in schools and higher education. Shap has supported RE teachers through regular conferences, an information service, the publication of books..., and an annual mailing consisting of a *Calendar of Festivals* and a journal. (Robert Jackson in King, 1990:113)

The working party is named after the Shap Wells hotel in (what is now) Cumbria, where a conference was held in 1969, which brought it into being. Robert Jackson writes that 'as a founder member and a Co-President until 1987, Geoffrey Parrinder contributed significantly to Shap's work' (in King, 1990:113f.). Parrinder himself recalls that:

> I tried to avoid office, as it was mainly for schoolteachers, but after Ninian Smart became president I became vice-president. I contributed to some of its publications - "Comparative Religion in Education", and "Hinduism", and spoke at conferences and acted on committees until a few years ago.[34]

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[33]The pluralist nature of British society is described in Badham, P. (ed) (1989) Religion, State, and Society in Modern Britain, Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press; and in Parsons, G. (ed) (1993) The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945 Volume 1: Traditions, London, Routledge/Open University.

[34]In a letter dated 6/1/92.

Actually, despite his modest comments, Parrinder was something more than a figure-head in Shap circles. Certainly, he was valued both for his human warmth and for conferring academic respectability on the work done largely by others. However, some members of Shap have privately and humorously asserted that it stands for 'Smart, Hinnells and Parrinder', which suggests that he has been as influential as his two distinguished colleagues.

During his London years, Parrinder gave three prestigious series of lectures. He was the Charles Strong Lecturer in Sydney in 1964, where he lectured on 'Christian Theology and Two Asian Faiths' (ie Islam and Hinduism). The Wilde Lectures, given at Oxford University from 1966 to 1969, were eventually published as Avatar and Incarnation. The Westcott Teape lectures were delivered in Delhi and Madras in 1973, and formed the basis of his book, Mysticism in the World's Religions.

He was a founder member of the British branch of the International Association for the History of Religions. E.O. James called a meeting at Exeter College, Oxford, on September 24th 1954, including (among others) Dorothy Emmett, D.W. Gundry and Parrinder. Gundry was appointed honorary secretary, and James president. When Gundry went from Bangor to Ibadan, Parrinder became secretary, a post he held (1960-1972) until he was president. He retired from that post in 1977, and was made an honorary life member of the Association. During his presidency, an international

meeting of the IAHR was held at Lancaster University in 1975. He was then made an honorary D.Litt of that university, together with Marcel Simon, the international president, Prince Mikasa of Japan, younger brother of (then) Emperor Hirohito and once Professor of Comparative Religion in Tokyo Women's Christian College, and Mircea Eliade (*in absentia*).

1.6 Retirement: 1977-.

In retirement, Parrinder has remained busy. Mary and he live in Orpington, Kent, as they have done since their return from Africa in 1958. Perhaps Geoffrey has more time than he used to for gardening, an activity listed as one of his three recreations in Who's Who. The other two, travel and literature, indicate that what used to be gainful employment have remained abiding joys.

From 1977 to 1978 he was Visiting Professor in the International Christian University, Tokyo, Japan, and from 1978 to 1982 he was a visiting lecturer at the University of Surrey. Since shortly after his appointment at King's College, London, he has been a member of the London Society of the Study of Religions (LSSR) and was its President from 1980 to 1982. This Society was founded in 1904. From its beginnings it included some Jewish scholars, the most notable of whom was Claude Montefiore. He read one of the earliest papers, on the subject of 'A Jewish view of the New Testament'. Although it has usually met three times a year at the Athenaeum, between the wars the Society often

met at Montefiore's home (Braybrooke, 1991:1). The Society has provided Parrinder with the opportunity, not only to hear the views and academic interests of other scholars of religion, but also to share his own and to refine them after discussion with its members. In particular, he acknowledges his debt to them in the creation of his book Avatar and Incarnation (Parrinder, 1970a:8).

Parrinder's contacts with Jewish scholars in the LSSR led him to join the London Society of Jews and Christians (LSJC) in 1963; he was President from 1981 to 1990, and is now Honorary Life President. Unlike the Council of Christians and Jews, which it pre-dates, it has not felt constrained to avoid theological discussions. Although a national body, the LSJC has most of its members in the London area, where it organises lectures and conferences (Braybrooke, 1991:29f.).

He was honoured by publications on the occasions of his 70th and 80th birthdays. In Autumn 1970, the journal Religion contained seven 'Essays for Geoffrey Parrinder at 70'. Two of these, Andrew Walls' 'A bag of needments for the road: Geoffrey Parrinder and the study of religion in Britain', and H.W. Turner's 'Geoffrey Parrinder's contributions to the studies of religion in Africa' are specifically about aspects of Parrinder's life, works and achievements. For his 80th birthday, Ursula King edited a book called Turning Points in Religious Studies. John Hinnells, Maurice Wiles and John Ferguson provided tributes

to Parrinder, but the larger part of the work is given over to three parts. Part 1 discusses 'Historical Developments in Britain' (in the area of Religious Studies); Part 2, 'Turning Points in the Development of some Academic Subjects and Themes'; and Part 3, 'Pointers to New Directions'. The areas covered in the book were deliberately chosen by the editor to be in parallel with Parrinder's interests. It is striking just how many areas he has surveyed.

1.7 Parrinder's influence as a populariser.

A major reason for assessing Parrinder's contribution to the study of religion is that he has written about a variety of subjects, and in a popular style. He has therefore been widely read.

Parrinder's books for schools are one illustration of his achievements as a populariser: indeed, What World Religions Teach has been his best-selling book. He has always striven after a popular style:

> Long ago I read Quiller-Couch's "The Art of Writing", and I have tried to follow his plea for plain English. Only a month after preaching near here a lady said "You've got all those letters after your name, and yet you speak in plain English". She could not have pleased me more.[35]

This desire to communicate to ordinary people in language they can understand lies behind most of his works. John Hinnells has written that 'his lectures, like his writing,

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[35]In a letter dated 31/7/89.

have a clarity and simplicity which belie the profundity of the thought' (in King, 1990:5). Parrinder has never been a scholar interested in research and writing for its own sake, but has wanted it to be available to others as useful for their work or in understanding the world around them.

It is striking how keenly Parrinder has detected and filled gaps in the market of information about religions. For example, in his introduction to Jesus in the Quran, he wrote that:

> This book has been written primarily for readers in the western world, the general public as well as students of theology and the comparative study of religions. But it is hoped that it may also be useful to some people in Asia and Africa who have asked for a modern and impartial study of the teaching of the Quran about Jesus, which seems to be unobtainable in English or Arabic. (Parrinder, 1976b:9)

It seems extraordinary that such a study should not have been available in English in 1965, yet it was not. It is even more notable that a need for the book is still perceived, so it is to be republished in 1995 by Oneworld in Oxford. In the case of Sex in the World's Religions (1980), he found an arresting title as well as a gap in the market. These are just two examples among many of his works which dealt with subjects calculated to appeal to the intelligent layperson who otherwise had no easy access to information about them; witchcraft, mysticism, and worship are three more such instances.

Since 1958, Parrinder has contributed the survey on religion for the Annual Register of World Events, the first

and only person to do so, though it was founded as long ago as 1759. This is another example of his ability to present large amounts of divers information in palatable form for the intelligent layperson.

One means of assessing Parrinder's continuing popularity is to trace the impact of some of his books: specifically, how long some of them remained in print. This is very difficult to do.[36] But in the case of some books, their marketability can be established. His first book, West African Religion was in print for forty years until 1989. Moreover, during 1995 and 1996, Oneworld Publishers of Oxford are to republish three of his books: Jesus in the Quran (first published in 1965); Mysticism in the World's Religions (1976); and Sex in the World's Religions (1980). They have also commissioned from him a new prose translation of the Bhagavad Gita. Each book will have an initial print run of 3,000 copies, and be distributed worldwide by Penguin.

Another indication of the popularity of his books is that a number of them have been translated into other languages. West African Religion was rendered into French as early as 1950; African Traditional Religion (1954) appeared in a Spanish version in 1956; Upanishads, Gita and Bible (1962) appeared in Italian in 1964 and in Spanish in 1982; The World's Living Religions (1964), was reproduced in Swedish (1964), Norwegian (1965) and Finnish (1969); Jesus in the

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[36]No publishers have been able to respond positively to my letters asking about print runs and other information on the books by Parrinder they have published.

Quran into Dutch in 1966 and 1978; A Book of World Religions (1965) into Italian in 1977; African Mythology (1967) into French in 1969; and Sex in the World's Religions (1980) into French in 1986. Moreover, Religion in an African City (1953) was reprinted by a publisher in the United States in 1972, Upanishads, Gita and Bible (1962) was published there in 1963, and an enlarged form of his school textbook What World Religions Teach (1963) was published by Oxford University Press of Bombay, India, in 1968.

1.8 Two caveats.

There are two groups of people whom Parrinder might have been expected to influence, where such influence has in the one case been played down, and in the other been minimal. The first coterie is African scholars of their ancestral religions.[37]

The other group has been the British Methodist Church. Since he returned from Africa, the Methodist Church has not formally used him either on its committees or in any teaching role. His only contribution, which has admittedly been a significant one, has been to teach and inspire a few Methodists who have become involved in the study of other religions. His students have included Kenneth Cracknell, the first secretary of the British Council of Churches' Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths (set up

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[37]See Chapter 4.3.

in 1978). In fact, Cracknell has written that, when he went to Nigeria as a missionary in the mid- 1960s:

> my understanding of African religion was re-shaped by two missionary scholars within my Methodist tradition, Edwin W. Smith and Geoffrey Parrinder. To these two, the latter of whom became for a time my supervisor at London University, I shall always be indebted. (Cracknell, 1995:x.)

But Parrinder has been used by the Methodist Church far less than he might have. One reason is that he simply never became part of the dominant and to some extent self-perpetuating bureaucratic and teaching élite. He was absent abroad at a time when that ruling class might have seen him as a coming young man. Moreover, he was in the wrong specialism. It is fascinating to speculate what might have happened to transform the training of a generation of Methodists ministers if, in 1955, the Methodist Church had designated him as tutor to his old seminary, Richmond College. Instead it appointed Marcus Ward, Parrinder's contemporary as a student there and an ex-India missionary, whose qualifications were far less than Parrinder's. However, although Ward knew little of the world of religions outside Christianity, he had been actively involved in the newly formed Church of South India.[38] A narrow ecumenism dominated Methodist thinking about relations with other religious groups throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s, including a failed attempt to form a united Church with the Church of England, and then a covenant with

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[38]See further, on the appointment of Ward: Newton, 1984:61.

a wider group of churches.[39] The wider ecumenism of relations with other religions was regarded as an irrelevance by many who bothered to think about it at all. Moreover, the Barthian position, against which Parrinder has contended all of his working life, came late to England, and made its profoundest impact after the Second World War, ironically at a time when many of the reasons for its popularity in mainland Europe (especially the triumph of Nazism and Fascism) had passed away or waned.[40] Thus, Parrinder attacked a position which many of his denomination supported, even though their theological roots should have taught them better.[41] Parrinder's stand was a courageous one for a Methodist minister to take, and it has meant that his influence has been smaller than it might or should have been. Furthermore, he has sometimes discovered his church's bureaucrats to have been small-minded or simply out of touch. For example:

> when the Methodist powers-that-be[42] heard that he had been appointed as Wilde Lecturer in Oxford they wrote him a sharp letter complaining that he had neither sought nor been granted permission of [the Methodist] Conference for this change of appointment. He confessed that he hadn't, for the simple reason that

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[39]For a Methodist perspective on the failed schemes, see the chapter entitled 'The Walk to the Paradise Garden' in Turner, 1985:194-225.

[40]Parrinder's deep disagreement with the position towards other religions represented in the writings of Barth and his followers will be examined in Chapter 2.

[41]Methodist roots are in an Arminian theology, not in Barth's Calvinism, a point that will be developed in Chapter 2.

[42]Specifically, the Revd Eric Baker, Secretary of the Methodist Conference from 1951-1970.

> he remained in post at King's, and that these were occasional lectures! (Ainger, 1995:33)

When in 1989 Parrinder attended a meeting of the Methodist Church's Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths held in the headquarters of the Methodist Church Overseas Division in Central London, he observed that it had been over thirty years since his last visit there. By the time the British Methodist Church both theologically, organisationally and bureaucratically looked beyond other churches to a wider ecumenism, Parrinder had retired. It was only in 1983 that the Methodist Conference appointed a Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, and five years later that that committee's part-time secretary became full-time director of Inter-Faith Relations for the Church.

Yet Parrinder's background as a Methodist missionary and his understanding of Christ and of Christian faith have been centrally important to his depiction of other religions and their believers. Thus, in Chapter 2, we shall seek to uncover the substance and origin of those aspects of his belief about God which have shaped his attitude towards the faith of others.

2. Parrinder's Christian Attitude to Other Faiths

What are Geoffrey Parrinder's beliefs about God? How have they helped him scan and interpret a religiously plural world? Has he modified them in the course of his encounters with other faiths, or has he applied a theology which he learned or simply absorbed from his Methodist heritage? These are the questions with which this chapter will deal. This chapter and the next, which interprets him as a Christian comparativist, will enable an assessment in chapters 4 to 7 of specific areas of his comparison of other faiths from a Christian perspective. Then, in the final chapter, we can examine other contemporary Christians' theological interpretations of religious pluralism, and assess Parrinder's contribution to the ongoing debate about Christian attitudes to other faiths.

2.1 What sort of God is God?

Many western intellectuals who have interpreted the human condition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have either been atheists or agnostics, or else their work has served to make atheism and agnosticism respectable and even popular in the western world. Parrinder mentioned four such eminent figures in his book An Introduction to Asian Religions (1957): Charles Darwin (1809-1882) the naturalist; James Frazer (1854-1951), who wrote on the

origins of religions; Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) the psychologist; and Karl Marx (1818-1883) the founder of communism (Parrinder, 1957:3f.). Parrinder argued that:

> these heresies [do not] explain, or even admit, the facts of revelations of God. Indeed they try to explain away religion without reference to God; which is absurd and irrational. (Parrinder, 1957:4)

Thus, his real interest was in encouraging western Christians to maintain their faith in the face of intellectual trends which were or could be interpreted as anti-religious. As the imprecise use of the word 'heresies' indicates, it did not lay in a making a meticulous scholarly rebuttal of those nineteenth and twentieth century philosophies which have reduced theology to anthropology, locating the origins of God in the minds of human beings.[43]

Darwin and Freud had already appeared in the second article of Parrinder's to be published, 'A Reasoned Approach to Religion' (in the *Expository Times* for February 1943), where they were in the company of the scientist Isaac Newton (1642-1727), rather than that of Frazer and Marx. This article went a stage further than his later book; it not only asserted the existence of God but also ventured a description of what sort of God, God is.

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[43]Such an attempt has been made by a younger scholar of comparative religion, John Bowker, in his The Sense of God (1973), with the sub-title, 'Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Approaches to the Origin of the Sense of God'. This important and under-rated work (based on his Wilde Lectures of 1972) is to be republished by Oneworld during 1995.

The title of the article shows one of Parrinder's concerns to have been to establish religion as rational. This was a way of stealing the intellectual garb of his opponents, who, in his opinion, mistook rationalism for mechanism:

> For mechanism is not rational; it does not explain, nor yet take into account all the facts. There is Mind in the universe, man is more than a machine, as the most rational common-sense insists, and man has a degree of liberty. (Parrinder, 1943:124)

Yet an even stronger motivation was to depict that 'Mind in the universe' as personal rather than impersonal or mechanistic. Parrinder argued that contemplating the physical universe leads the gazer to affirm the truth of the teleological argument for the proof of God's existence, which stresses the evidence of design or purpose. He believed there is 'a Life-Force or Universe-Mind' which is 'the ground of the whole of life, giving the conditions and the possibility of order and purpose, and making evolution intelligible'. Parrinder implied a hierarchy of being, culminating in human beings, 'the crown of life', who differ from the rest of creation:

> Man is distinctive because he thinks. If man thinks, can the Universe-mind which informs the world with order and purpose and which produced man be inferior to its product? (Parrinder, 1943:125)

Parrinder assumed the answer, no. As well as being thinking animals, humans also have personality. Parrinder was convinced that in this, too, they reflect the Life-force or Universe-mind. He argued that there is personality in God, to which all religions testify: 'religion has not existed

without belief in a personal God' (Parrinder, 1943:126).[44] His final flourish of words is more hortatory than self-evidently true:

> Without repudiating the rightful place of philosophy, the religious consciousness must yet affirm that not the blind undifferentiated life of monism, but the God of Jesus and the prophets is the God of all reasonable and living religion. (Parrinder, 1943:127)

This quotation illustrates an article which is untypical of Parrinder in certain respects (in particular, the style is uncharacteristically clumsy). Yet it reveals more than it conceals of its author's sympathies. Since human beings, constituted as conscious, rational, and capable of personal relations, reflect aspects of God himself, they are able in some measure to discern him and enter into a relation with him. And although 'the best symbol of God is surely the highest personality that we have known, Christ, "the image of God"' (Parrinder, 1943:127), there is no condemnation of other religions. Rather, it is implied that they provide not only the desire but the means of establishing some level of relationship with him.

Even more important is that early in his writing career, Parrinder argued for, or more precisely simply asserted, the existence of a personal God over against an impersonal or monistic view of reality. This was to become the central concern of his writings about Indian religion, and the

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[44]The implications of this statement for his knowledge of and attitude towards aspects of Buddhism will be discussed in Chapter 7.1.

major reason why he has never adequately interpreted the variety of that sub-continent's beliefs about transcendent being.[45]

2.2 Parrinder and Kraemer: 1939.

Parrinder's article 'A Reasoned Approach to Religion' only implied a role for the world's religions because he had already dealt with that theme in his earliest published article, 'The Christian Attitude to non-Christian Religions' (in the *Expository Times* for June 1939). Here, he was writing out of a deep disagreement, not with secular ideologies which refuted or marginalised God but with Christian theologians whose work made it theoretically or even practically impossible to describe a positive role for faith that is not Christian. In particular, Parrinder deplored the theology of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner (1889-1965), and particularly Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965).

The spur to this article was Kraemer's book, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian world, written for the meeting of the International Missionary Conference (IMC) at Tambaram near Madras in South India in 1938. The IMC had been brought into being by the famous World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. The chairman of that conference was the American Methodist layman John Raleigh Mott (1865-1955), whose name was associated with the slogan which he had given to the Student Volunteer Movement for

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[45]See Chapter 7, especially 7.5.

Foreign Missions in the 1880s and 1890s: 'The Evangelization of the World in this Generation'. The slogan remained alluring to many members of the Edinburgh Conference (Neill, 1964:393). But by the Jerusalem IMC Conference of 1928, this optimism had largely died away. Parrinder noted the 'bewilderment and dismay' expressed there by certain members of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Europe with missionaries of America and Britain who, they believed, demonstrated 'an attitude of what seemed to them, compromise and syncretism towards the non-Christian systems of religion'. As a result of this, the Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer was appointed 'to prepare a statement for the Madras Conference, setting forth the fundamental truths of Christianity, and defining the Christian message to the non-Christian world' (Parrinder, 1939:390).

The title of Hendrik Kraemer's book is suggestive. It makes it clear that its author sided with those who had become more pessimistic about the advancement of the Christian gospel. Kraemer had spent some years in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) as an expert in languages and Bible translation on behalf of the Bible Society of the Netherlands (Neill, 1960:113). In Indonesia, Islam was and remains the religion of the vast majority of the population, and Christianity has made little headway. Indeed, in most of Asia the opportunities that imperialism furnished for European and American missionaries to work in lands conquered by or open to western powers had not led to

large-scale conversions to Christianity. Some western liberals (C.F. Andrews, for example, who had made an impression upon Parrinder during the latter's college days) believed that imperial power, particularly its manifestations of cultural and racial superiority, hindered rather than helped the spread of the gospel.[46]

Throughout the 1930s, the ideology of imperialism was under increasing attack. Although the western empires remained intact (indeed, Italy had added to their number by invading Abyssinia [now Ethiopia] in 1935), perhaps even at the time, they were and even (to some) seemed anachronistic. In fact, imperialism was a system that was unravelling. A symbol of this is the fact that in the same year as the Italians invaded the horn of Africa (1935), the Government of India Act (which became the basis of the post-independence Indian Constitution of 1950) increased the involvement of Indians in the political running of their country.

It was against this background that Kraemer's book was written. He described Christian faith recorded in the Bible as primarily God's encounter with sinful humans in their total beings, challenging them to take decisions. This

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[46]For much of 1906, Andrews shared a house in Simla with the headmistress of a girl's establishment. When he invited his Indian friend Rudra and Rudra's son Sudhir to stay, she declared that she 'could not sit at table with an Indian'. Andrews described how 'the iron of India's subjection and humiliation entered into my very soul'. (quoted in O'Connor, 1990:67)

interpretation of the Bible, Kraemer called 'Biblical realism' (Kraemer, 1938:66ff.). He wrote that:

> Nowhere has revelation been taken in such a radical and absolute manner as in the sphere of Biblical realism... Nowhere has the inherent correlation between revelation as the act of God and faith as the corresponding organ of human apprehension and as the gift of God been grasped so fully. Nowhere is the genuine gift of revelation maintained so seriously... (Kraemer, 1938:69f.)

According to Kraemer, the revelation of Christ was not the perfection of human reason, but was, rather, 'a "stumbling-block" to the Jews, "sheer folly" to the Gentiles [I Corinthians I:23]' (Kraemer, 1938:70). Kraemer joined with Barth in making a sharp distinction between religion and revelation. Kraemer perceived that to appreciate Barth 'one ought to have in mind the whole development of theological thinking in the last two centuries'. Both thinkers criticised 'the representatives of the enlightenment... blinded to the peculiarly religious and unique character of Biblical realism;... in their humanist theology the light of reason became *the* organ of revelation' (Kraemer, 1938:116).

Instead, all religions, including Christianity, were judged by God's revelation in Christ:

> For the revealing function of this light is that, when exposed to it, all religious life, the lofty and the degraded, appear to lie under the divine judgement, because it is *misdirected*. This is the dialectical "no" of the revelation in Christ to all religious life, and also to every point of contact in the sense of its being one that, if it were properly developed, would end in the sphere of the revelation in Christ. At the same time, however, this revealing light means

> a dialectical "yes," a comprehension of religion and the various religions that is deeper and more adequate than their understanding of themselves, because it uncovers the groping and persistent human aspiration and need for "the glory of the children of God" in the misdirected expressions of religious life. (Kraemer, 1938:136f.)

The gospel was not in continuity but in discontinuity with humanity's religious life, and called each person from disbelief to faith in what God had done in Christ:

> The function of natural theology will henceforth be, not to construe preparatory stages and draw unbroken, continuous lines of religious development ending and reaching their summit in Christ, but in the light of the Christian revelation to lay bare the dialectical condition not only of the non-Christian religions but of *all* the human attempts towards apprehension of the totality of existence. Or, to put it differently, to uncover in the light of the revelation in Christ the different modes of God-, self- and world-consciousness of man in his religious life. (Kraemer, 1938:125)

Actually, Kraemer followed Brunner's 'protest' against Barth's utter condemnation of natural theology. According to Kraemer, Barth 'will not and cannot deny *that* God works and has worked in man outside the Biblical sphere of revelation, but *how* this has happened he refuses to discuss' (Kraemer, 1938:120). In Kraemer's view 'no man, and certainly no Christian, can claim the power or the right to limit God's revelatory working' (Kraemer, 1938:122), and he wrote that God:

> shines through in a broken, troubled way: in reason, in nature and in history. Otherwise the urge for truth, beauty, goodness and holiness, stirring in science, philosophy, art, religion are incomprehensible. (Kraemer, 1938:120f.)

Kraemer was willing to call these events 'general revelation', though he emphasised that such revelation can only be discerned in the light of the 'special revelation' of Jesus Christ. Kraemer wrote that:

> General revelation can henceforth only mean that God shines revealingly through the works of His creation (nature), through the thirst and quest for truth and beauty, through conscience and the thirst and quest for goodness, which throbs in man even in his condition of forlorn sinfulness, because God is continuously occupying Himself and wrestling with man, in all ages and with all peoples. This "general revelation" can only be effectively discovered in the light of the "special revelation". (Kraemer, 1938:125)

Parrinder's difference of opinion from Kraemer was not over the importance of the Christian's missionary task to proclaim Christ, but about the Dutchman's appraisal of other faiths:

> We do believe in the necessity of Christ for every man, and are not satisfied by airy talk about comparative 'values', and therefore we may consider Dr Kraemer's emphasis is, generally, in the right direction. But it is difficult to agree that all other religions are of no value, and their sacred books worthless in comparison with the Old [? sic for New] Testament. (Parrinder, 1939:390)

On this matter of 'values', Parrinder may be not have been entirely fair to Kraemer. Despite his criticism of all faiths in the light of the revelation in Christ, Kraemer did not utterly deny value to them, but, rather, because he interpreted 'every religion... [as] a living, indivisible reality' (Kraemer, 1938:135), he was sceptical about the possibility of comparing a theme in one by something that looked analogous in another:

> The point is that one does not know what the real force, value and function of the idea of God or of redemption or of faith or of the soul or of anything else is, if one does not primarily take into account what is the fundamental existential apprehension of the totality of life which dominates this whole religion, and what place and significance God, redemption, the soul or faith or anything else has in this existential apprehension. (Kraemer, 1938:136)

According to Parrinder:

> It is this intense 'Biblical realism' that challenges man to decide for or against God. In his insistent, almost wearisome, reiteration of the fundamental Biblical realism Kraemer denies that such realism and witness to God is to be found anywhere else outside of the Hebrew revelation; though he is obliged to make certain concessions to Islam and later Judaism. All the other religions of the world, however, are summed up and dismissed with the label of 'naturalist religions of trans-empirical realization.' We learn, in a note (p. 143) that this phrase means that all non-Semites try to achieve the identity of their real selves with divine reality; they seek to employ God for their own ends, as 'eros' always does, and are in possession of no authentic revelation. Christianity is antagonistic 'to all human religious aspirations and ends' (p. 123) for they all seek to possess God, rather than submit themselves to His own free acts. (Parrinder, 1939:390)

Parrinder noted that Kraemer, though dependent on the 'dialectical' school associated primarily with Karl Barth, is particularly indebted to Emil Brunner's book The Mediator, and particularly its discussion of the notion of a general and special revelation. Parrinder wrote that:

> Brunner discusses the essential revelatory claim of all religions; they invariably depend upon theopanies [sic for theophanies], oracles and miracles. But as one [sic for none] of these revelations is final, therefore none of them may properly be termed a revelation; and, as they happened several times, nothing happened at all. They belong to the cycle of Nature, and are mythical; whereas a true historical revelation could only happen once for all. (Parrinder, 1939:391)

In Parrinder's judgement:

> Both Brunner and Kraemer present us with an exaggerated apologia for the Christian place in the world's religions, and their scheme is vitiated, not because it is entirely unsound, but because it is an over-statement. For some reason they do not wish to admit that there can be any revelation of God outside of Christ. (Parrinder, 1939:391)

Parrinder noted that:

> Along with a fearless proclamation of the uniqueness of the gospel there is also a great Christian tradition of sympathetic approach to those who have not had the good fortune to come within the scope of the Christian witness. (Parrinder, 1939:392)

He mentioned the apostolic preaching, the Johannine writings, the apologists and Greek fathers, authors of scholasticism and of later centuries. Natural theology. Parrinder averred, marks a cleavage between the Barthian and Roman Catholic traditions:

> Brunner (pp. 32-33) condemns the Roman system, because it seeks to lay a foundation in Nature on which the revealed Grace of God may be erected, overarching the whole... This is held by Brunner to be impossible..., because Christ is not supplementary but unique. Kraemer continues the good work, acknowledging that reason has a true place, but not defining that place.[47] (Parrinder, 1939:392)

Parrinder's own conviction was that the categories of general and special revelation, more liberally interpreted than either Brunner or Kraemer felt able to, are more

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[47]See Kraemer, 1938:114f. for his criticism of Aquinas. In Kraemer's view, against Aquinas, 'according to Biblical realism, the opposite of grace is not nature or reason, but sin'.

positive and meaningful terms by which to assess the faith of others than Kraemer's 'Biblical realism':

> At many times, then, and in divers manners, God has spoken unto our fathers, and this we will call General Revelation. The initiative is with God, He reveals Himself. But in Jesus Christ we have a Revelation that not only surpasses all others, but that is without parallel; different in quality and kind... This, indeed, we may call the Special Revelation; the One, Unique Miracle, occurring 'once for all.' (Parrinder, 1939:393)

It is important to note that a crucial difference between Parrinder and Kraemer was where they experienced the faith of others. Although Parrinder became aware of the world of Islam in West Africa, at this stage he was much more intrigued by primal faith. This was rapidly being replaced by Christianity or Islam as at least the notional faith of most West Africans. Parrinder could therefore appreciate a faith which was not perceived by him as a threat. In the Dutch East Indies, where most Muslims remained impervious to Christian claims, Kraemer faced the dilemma of why and how this could be so. Ironically, Kraemer's solution of Biblical realism, which asserted the paramount importance of biblical revelation over against human experience, seems at least in part to have arisen out of his existential dilemma as a Calvinist in a (as he saw it) recalcitrantly Muslim country.[48]

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[48]Kraemer referred to 'the exceptional stubbornness of Islam towards the efforts of Christian missions' (Kraemer, 1939:353). The two reasons he offers, group solidarity and the acquaintance of Islam with Christianity from its very beginnings, are not especially compelling. Rather, he seems to have picked out Islam because that was the religion of which he had considerable existential knowledge, though his

Parrinder's article is impressive for its perceptive discussion of Kraemer's book; his seems, by and large, a balanced view even though he disagreed with its major thrust. At the time, he was immersed in reading for the first of his many degrees, and this study shows how thorough and observant a student he was; remarkably so, given how isolated he was in West Africa from major libraries and unfolding events in Western Europe (though he was on furlough in Britain for part of 1938).

2.3 Parrinder and Kraemer: 1962.

Over two decades later, Parrinder furrowed old ground in his book Comparative Religion (1962), by re-examining his differences with Kraemer, Brunner and Barth. He reassessed the emphasis of Brunner, in the light of his book Revelation and Reason (1941; English translation, 1947). According to Parrinder, in Revelation and Reason[49]:

> Brunner does not reject, as Barth does, the possibility of some form of general revelation, or perhaps intuition, outside Christianity. But he contrasts it keenly with the vertical special revelation given by "the God of the Bible, the God who seeks man." (Parrinder, 1977a:48)

Actually, Brunner's later work did not initiate his misgivings with Barth's interpretation of natural theology. In his book, Nature and Grace (1934), Brunner had argued

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empathetic and even academic understanding of it has been exaggerated by his supporters, as we shall discuss in the next section of the text (Chapter 2.3).

[49]See, especially, the section on 'The Witness of the Spirit' in Brunner, 1947:164-184.

that a legitimate natural theology can be found in the doctrine of creation, because human beings are created in the image of God. Despite the sinfulness of human nature, people can discern God in nature and the events of history. There is thus a 'point of contact' (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) for divine revelation within human nature. Barth responded in his book, No, by arguing that there is no knowledge of God except by God's revelation. God does not need any 'point of contact' in humans for his revelation. Thus the God whom human reason perceives in a natural knowledge is a projection, not the one, true Christian God.[50]

Kraemer located the 'point of contact' in the missionary, who must:

> have an untiring and genuine interest in the religion, the ideas, the sentiments, the institutions - in short, in the whole range of the life of the people among whom one works, *for Christ's sake and for the sake of those people*. (Kraemer, 1938:140)

Parrinder's description of Barth's and Kraemer's contributions to a theology of religions was much more hostile than it had been in 1939. He dealt with them mainly in a chapter called 'The Attitude To Other Religions', where he referred to 'a division within Christianity itself' (Parrinder, 1977a:47) about this subject.

In 1939, Parrinder had concentrated mainly on Brunner and Kraemer, although he made it clear that Barth was the

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[50]Both books, originally published in German in 1934, were translated into English and published together in 1947 as Natural Theology (London, SCM).

origin of their (in his judgement) misguided views about religion. In 1962, Parrinder wrote much more strongly of Barth that:

> [he] maintained that the Christian revelation was not to be questioned, for that is sinful pride and the revealed Word of God must be accepted. If it were asked how the Word of God could be recognized, the answer would be that one cannot judge, for man is utterly corrupt. This seems to lead straight to determinism and rigid Calvinism: God chooses some and damns others. (Parrinder, 1977a:47f.)

Kraemer's position was also more sharply presented by Parrinder in 1962 than in 1939. Formerly, he had written that:

> It is uncertain whether Kraemer would accept Barth's dictum that 'religion is unbelief; it is the work of *godless* man'[51]; and he dissents from the assertion that 'there is no point of contact' with non-Christian religions. (Parrinder, 1939:391)

Over two decades later, he wrote that:

> In face of other religions and their claim to serve God in different ways, Kraemer cannot admit the genuineness of the claim. Religion, as distinct from Christianity, 'is unbelief; it is the work of godless man.' Even Muslims, who are monotheists and share part of our Jewish inheritance, are rejected: 'the God of Muhammad is an idol like other idols.' We seem to be back in the Middle Ages. And Kraemer will not allow any 'points of contact' between Christianity and any other religion, only a complete breach is possible. (Parrinder, 1977a:48)

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[51]The official English translation of this passage from Barth's Church Dogmatics is: 'We begin by stating that religion is unbelief. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man...' (Barth, 1961, vol 1, part 2:299).

Here, accuracy deserted Parrinder, whose assessment of Kraemer in 1939 had been more exact. His ironic undermining of Kraemer there has given way to angry dismissal of his views. Moreover, in 1962, he seems to have confused Kraemer's position with that of Barth. Parrinder argues, indeed almost taunts, that the positions of Brunner and Kraemer seem oddly close to claims of Islam:

> [Kraemer's] attitude would lead, as we have noted on Brunner above, to a head-on collision of these two faiths which both believe in the revelation of the transcendent God in a sacred book - only different books. The claim of Islam is just as sweeping as that of any Calvinist, and its doctrine of predestination brings it strangely parallel to that Christian heresy. What can be said by such opposing faiths? The well-known story of the Presbyterian elder arguing with the Jesuit suggests the only answer: 'We must agree to differ. We are both trying to serve God; you in your way, and I in his'. (Parrinder, 1977a:49)

Parrinder then compared these 'sweeping' claims unfavourably with the more charitable claims of Islam:

> It must be said of the Muslim that if his religion will have no truck with idolaters yet it has always traditionally honoured other 'religions of a book'; Jewish, Christian, and Zoroastrian. Would that fundamentalists were at least as charitable. And if a religion is known by its fruits, and the greatest of these is charity, then there must be something wrong with a religion that condemns all other faiths, and with them the greater part of mankind, to hell. (Parrinder, 1977a:4)

The New Zealand scholar, H.W. Turner, writing in the collection of essays presented to Parrinder on his 70th birthday, took issue with this assessment of a Calvinist theology of religions:

> I could wish that the tolerance and accuracy to which we are rightly exhorted in our dealings with other religions had been more evident in his remarks on what seem to be his *trois bêtes noirs*, Calvin, Barth and Kraemer. It does not sound at all like Parrinder to read that with the positions of such distinguished theological figures 'we seem to be back in the middle ages', with a 'Christian heresy' that condemns 'all other faiths and the greater part of mankind to hell' (p. 49). He is clearly moved to indignation and even horror. (in King and Walls, 1980:162)

Turner noted Parrinder's confusion of Kraemer's teaching with Barth's:

> Kraemer has been misrepresented [by Parrinder] as a 'Barthian', something he always found embarrassing, when in fact his position resembles that of Emil Brunner with whom Parrinder is much happier. (in King and Walls, 1980:162)

Turner could not have read Parrinder's article of 1939 and its more measured and accurate assessment of Brunner's influence upon Kraemer. Moreover, it is difficult to associate the concept of happiness, in however qualified a form, with Parrinder's understanding, in either of his writings, of Brunner's teaching about religion. Turner also argued that Parrinder has presented the 'standard popular interpretation' of Barth, which he believes to be wrong in two respects. First, it ignores the fact that Barth's critique was of all religions, especially Christianity. Barth admitted that he knew little of other religions, and was arguing not with them but with the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1934), the father of 'liberal Protestantism'. Secondly, Barth did not intend the wholesale 'abolition' of religion, as readers of his Church Dogmatics in English would be led to understand, but rather

its abolition in one form to preserve it in another (in King and Walls, 1980:163).[52]

This may be true, but it ignores two significant points. The first is that the historical context of Barth, Brunner and Kraemer is a significant starting point for any interpretation of them. Parrinder is not primarily a historian,[53] but in relation to the matter under discussion he seems a better one than Turner. In 1962, Parrinder had noted that:

> The uncompromising character of the Barthian school was perhaps natural in its historical setting, for the 'German Christians' under Hitler were coming to an accommodation with the state and appealing to reason rather than revelation to justify their position. (Parrinder, 1977a:47)

In 1939, he had not seen that point. Perhaps he was too close to the events, or had no means of knowing about it from his vantage point in French West Africa. Moreover, by 1962 the criticisms of the German churches for their subservience to Nazi rule and policies by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-45) were widely known.

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[52]Turner's point about the ambiguity of the word translated as 'abolition' in English (in German, it is *Aufhebung*) has been widely made, though no generally agreed results about what that ambiguity means for a possible theology of religions by post-Barth Barthians has been reached. A good discussion is found in Donald Dayton's article 'Karl Barth and the Wider Ecumenism' in Phan, 1990:181-189, esp. 183f.

[53]Andrew Walls was mistaken to assert that 'Geoffrey Parrinder's method has been essentially historical' (in King and Walls, 1980:149). It has been primarily comparative and descriptive: see further, Chapter 3. Such a methodology is often severely ahistorical. See, *inter alia*, Chapter 7.6.

Turner did not mention the historical context of Barth, Brunner and Kraemer at all, thus showing his own Barthian sympathies in making other, even crucially important, matters such as historical contextualisation secondary to revelation. Neither Parrinder nor Turner noticed that whereas Barth's and Brunner's beliefs had arisen out of the inability of liberal Christianity to prevent the Great War of 1914-18 or the rise of fascism in the 1930s, Kraemer's were linked to the failure of another totalitarian system, western imperialism, to facilitate the Christian missionary endeavour in some of the occupied lands, specifically in Asia. Parrinder missed an opportunity here to develop the historical and geographical reasons for differences between Barth and Brunner, working in 'Christian' Europe, and Kraemer, whose theology arose out of his experiences in other parts of the world, notably in the Dutch East Indies.

The second significant point missed by Turner is that Parrinder's dismissal of Kraemer's views were not primarily taken for theological reasons, but because of his practical as well as academic involvement with Religious Studies. Parrinder, of course, has had a great deal to do with members of other faiths. This practical research distinguishes him, not only from Barth and Brunner working in Christian Europe, though in the shadow of fascism, but also from Kraemer.

Yet some scholars have praised Kraemer's knowledge of other faiths, particularly Islam. Lesslie Newbigin, for example,

wrote that in Kraemer's book for the Tambaram Conference 'The world of religions is taken with immense seriousness and studied with profound and scholarly understanding; not for nothing was the author known as "Sheikh Kraemer"' (Newbigin, 1968:33f.). This misses the point that any learning, however immense and serious it seems to others who agree with its conclusions (and who themselves may have little empathetic involvement with other religious traditions)[54], is arid and sterile when it imposes some theoretical world-view upon others but does not engage with real people to seek out what they actually believe.

By looking at Muslims and others primarily or, indeed, only through spectacles which interpreted to him that they are not Christians, Kraemer had a distorted vision. He certainly had a magisterial belief in his own competence in this area. He wrote that 'the preceding picture is not at all complete in regard to empirical Islam as a whole, but it gives the whole *essence* of Islam' (Kraemer, 1938:223f.); which is a large claim, since only 8½ pages of this chapter of his book deal with Islam. In fact, his knowledge of that religion may have been considerable but was not particularly insightful, a fact which Parrinder failed to note, and which Newbigin, who is ill-informed about Islam, has no scholarly means of discerning.[55] For example, Kraemer

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[54]A comparison between Parrinder and Newbigin will be made in Chapter 8.4.

[55]Newbigin's knowledge of Islam is of an elementary kind, which distorts what it sees through Christian spectacles. For example, on the subject of the *ummah*, he

described the *ummah* (community) as 'from the very first moment... a thoroughly secularized theocracy' (Kraemer, 1938:223), which fails to ask fruitful historical questions about it. The word 'secularized' imparts to Islam an enlightenment, western framework of meaning; moreover, the word has ambivalent, rather negative resonances for western Christians, denoting an anti-religious process. Significantly, Kraemer does not mention the intra-Islamic discussion about whether there has ever been a united *ummah* or if, given Islamic law and its tolerance of limited diversity, there ever could or even should be. Moreover, he wrongly but consistently transliterated *ummah* as *'ummah*, with an Arabic *ayn*, which suggests that, although he was a linguist, Arabic was not a language he knew well (Kraemer, 1938:222f.).

Furthermore, for all Kraemer's ahistorical emphasis upon the absolute centrality of revelation, in practice he imposed his own culturally-determined religious convictions and practices on other Christians as well as on non-Christians. The British missionary and academic, Stephen Neill (1900-1984), who viewed other faiths from Kraemer's perspective, nevertheless noted that:

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has written that 'Islam denies the doctrine of original sin and therefore believes that it is possible to achieve a total identification of the laws of a state with the law of God': Newbigin, 1986:116. The word 'therefore' is revealing: whatever Islam believes about the *ummah* has nothing to do with the Christian doctrine of original sin, not even by reaction to it. Moreover, many Muslims frown on the concept of 'state-hood', and Newbigin's sentence reveals nothing of the variety or subtlety of Muslim beliefs about Islamic or human community.

> The founder of the Church [in Bali], Dr Hendrik Kraemer, was determined that from the beginning this was to be the Church of the people and not of the missionaries. The result has been seen in a most laudable and satisfactory spirit of independence. But in all its inner and outward life the Balinese Church is more like the Dutch Reformed Church than the Dutch Reformed Church itself. It manifests hardly a trace of the wonderful art and culture of that most beautiful island. (Neill, 1964:535)

This rather contradicts Kraemer's commitment to the necessity of indigenisation.[56]

One of the ironies of treating Christian relations with people of other faiths purely at a theoretical and theological level, particularly one which leaves little scope for an appreciative encounter, is that is leads to profound ignorance of the achievements of Christians who have chosen other ways of engagement. Parrinder alluded to this when he wrote that 'Hendrik Kraemer speaks of the "coming dialogue" of religions, as if despite all the contacts of East and West the issues are not yet joined' (Parrinder, 1977a:127). The issues had been joined for many years before Kraemer's influential book, as Parrinder well knew from his friendship with Edwin Smith and other such

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[56] 'There is the obligation to strive for the presentation of the Christian truth in terms and modes of expression that make its challenge intelligible and related to the peculiar quality of reality in which they live': Kraemer, 1938:303. Moreover, the Tambaram Conference had affirmed that 'The Church is called to the Appropriation of all that Traditional Cultures may contribute to the Enrichment of its Life and that of the Church Universal': Mott, 1939:53.

sympathetic Christian scholars of other faiths and cultures.[57]

Despite these serious drawbacks to his vision of God's presence among humanity, Kraemer's influence has reverberated through Western Protestant Christian circles. The founding fathers of the World Council of Churches (WCC; founded in 1948), not least the first Secretary-General, Visser 't Hooft, also a Dutchman, followed Kraemer's line on non-Christian religions. Not until after the New Delhi conference of 1961 was a Programme on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths set up, at first within the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism; it only became a separate Programme in 1971. For years, the Kraemerian position led the WCC to ignore or marginalise the question of the faith of most humans. In 1960, Stephen Neill could write that:

> Naturally there were at Tambaram representatives of the older liberalism, to whom Kraemer's doctrine was anathema... Suffice it to say that, in a measure though not entirely, the movement of Christian thought over twenty years has been in the direction of Kraemer rather than away from him, and that many of the things that shocked Tambaram would seem a good deal less startling, if said today. (Neill, 1960:114f.)

So, in 1962, Parrinder was writing at a time when Kraemer's views were dominant in Western Protestant intellectual and bureaucratic circles, though they were beginning to be challenged. No wonder this dominance irked him, for he knew

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[57]Many examples of sympathetic assessments by Christians of other faiths, some of which were grounded in actual encounter and not just 'book-learning', are given in Cracknell, 1995:*passim*.

how far Kraemer's views had failed to convince many members of the Tambaram Conference. In 1939, he had pointed out that 'Christian Hindus are not in doubt as to the reality of the experiences of their countrymen' (Parrinder, 1939:391). In 1951, he stated that 'there was considerable opposition to Kraemer's point of view at the World Missionary Council, notably from Indian and Chinese delegates' (Parrinder, 1951a:212fn1). In 1962, he noted that Kraemer himself 'admitted that even at the Tambaram Conference his views had made "appallingly small" progress' (Parrinder, 1977a:51).

These views had indeed met with fierce resistance, from a number of quarters. A significant number of Christian missionaries and travellers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had, at least to some extent, appreciation and even reverence for the faith of those whom they encountered. Around the time of the Tambaram Conference, one of the greatest of them, C.F. Andrews, 'unceremoniously dumped' his copy of The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World into his waste-paper basket (O'Connor, 1990:4). The biographer of Andrews' missionary years, Daniel O'Connor, has observed that only:

> now, towards the end of the twentieth century, [have Western, Protestant Christians] come out from under the long shadow that that [Tambaram] conference cast over so much of Christian relations with people of other faiths... (O'Connor, 1990:4)

Parrinder would agree with O'Connor's judgement. The intemperate tone of his words about Barth and Kraemer in

1962 is explicable because their influence lingered longer than Parrinder thought or hoped it would. Five years later, he observed that: 'Following on Karl Barth's complete rejection of other religions as "sin", the "work of godless man", the missionary interpretations of Hendrik Kraemer have blighted serious study and creative encounter with men of other faiths' (Parrinder, 1968b:14).

It does indeed seem strange that Kraemer could have been a Professor of the History and Phenomenology of Religions (at Leiden, from 1937 to 1948). History and phenomenology were not his strong points, but rather a particular Christian perspective which was too narrow even for his world, let alone ours.

2.4 Questions of Religious Truth.

Thus far, we have explored Parrinder's theology as a negative response to the Barthian school's position on other faiths. However, his views have also been expressed as a positive response to the wide worlds, geographical, ideological and spiritual, which he has inhabited. Although he rejected Kraemerian and related views, the question of truth has been important to him. In this section, we shall explore how it has been significant. This will lead to a discussion of his Methodist roots and its theological implications for assessing the status of other faiths than Christianity.

In 1970, Parrinder entitled his inaugural lecture to the Chair of the Comparative Study of Religions in the University of London, 'And Is It True?'. It is significant that he chose to examine the question of truth for such a momentous occasion, and noteworthy that he was not a young man, but a seasoned scholar, sixty years old, dealing with an issue he believed to be extremely important. It was published two years later in a revised form.

Only towards the end of his lecture did Parrinder focus the question, 'Is it true?', turning to Islam as a specific or special example. One scholar to whom Parrinder referred is Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and the 'two important and unusual questions' he asked in his book Questions of Religious Truth (1967): namely, 'Is the Quran the Word of God?', and 'Are Religions True or False?'. Parrinder noted that Smith indicated several levels on which to answer the question, 'Is it true?'. One is factual: the Quran records matters of fact which can in theory be assessed to see if they are right. But Parrinder stated how difficult this enterprise is even for a religion like Islam which makes much of its historical base and emphases; much more so for a religion like Buddhism. Another and deeper level is to consider the place of the Quran in the life of the Islamic community. Parrinder particularly approved of Smith's dictum that, whatever non-Muslim academics adjudge to be the case, the Quran is the word of God to millions of Muslims in the world today, and that it may become so to others who find that God speaks to them through its words (Parrinder,

1972c:25ff.). Parrinder wrote that this 'takes us beyond scholarship to faith, but it may help us to appreciate the faith of other men, and that in its turn can affect our estimate of other religions' (Parrinder, 1972c:27).

There, tantalisingly, Parrinder left matters. He discussed, approvingly, some scholars who have argued that truth is perceived by religious people, even those who are not Christian. But he did not add anything to the debate, only drew attention to it in a descriptive way.

In fact, Parrinder rarely wrestles strenuously with deep theological and philosophical issues.[58] This is illustrated by his relatively recent book, Encountering World Religions (1987), an anecdotal recounting of his practical and intellectual engagements with the faith of others. His semi-autobiographical reflections take him through Buddhism, various forms of Hinduism, Sikhism, Islam, African Primal Religion, Christian syntheses, and (what he calls) borderline religions; and then some insubstantial reflections on how others see Christians, mission, the teaching of religion, and the value of seeking and sharing.

That this is a popularist book rather than a seriously academic engagement with the important issues it raises is illustrated by his location of the Hare Krishna movement in the context of Hindu and Indian religion instead of in a

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[58]This is true even of his *magnum opus* in the field of Christian theological and philosophical reflection upon other faiths, Avatar and Incarnation: Chapter 7.4.

section on New Religious Movements, without critical discussion. An interesting case could be made for either category, but none is attempted. Rather, Parrinder tells an amusing story of how in 1973 he was summoned to see His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada who 'with true religious dogmatism' declared that the interpretations of his rival Mahesh Yogi of Transcendental Meditation were wrong, barely let Parrinder get a word in, and asserted that his own English translation was the only acceptable one of the Bhagavad Gita (Parrinder, 1987a:43ff.). At the time, Parrinder was preparing his own translation of the Gita; no wonder, therefore, at his wry amusement of the Swami's pretensions. This story enabled Parrinder to raise the matter of the appeal of Indian religion for western youth discontented with contemporary Christianity, make a mocking reference to the money that some Oriental teachers have made out of such people, and trace his own story of his involvement with India and the Gita.

In Encountering World Religions, Parrinder's contribution to the issue of religious truth has been practical, experiential and popularising rather than erudite. For example, the actual and potential influence of Indian spirituality upon western thought is much better assessed in his The Christian Debate: Light From The East (1964) than in the amusing but cursory account in Encountering World Religions.[59]

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[59]See Chapter 7.2.

In describing issues of religious truth, Parrinder has not been an original thinker. He has implicitly appropriated W.C. Smith's assumption that truth is not an indivisible reality, but raises a number of questions: Encountering World Religions has as its sub-title, 'Questions of Religious Truth', borrowed from Smith's book of that name. Parrinder's concern has been twofold. First, he has accepted the views of other more creative thinkers that God speaks outside Christian faith, and built on this to make his own particular contribution, especially in the fields of African and Indian religion. Secondly, he has popularised these views, arguing for or simply assuming the view of God such writers imply, a God whose interest in humankind reaches beyond Christians. Indeed, for Parrinder he is a God of universal grace and Christlike charity. He learned this from his Methodist roots.

2.5 His Methodist Roots: (i) Universal Grace.

Turner maintains that 'Parrinder does not pretend to be a professional theologian' (in King and Walls, 1980:162). Maybe so, but that does not mean that Parrinder has no theological position. In fact, we have noted that much of it seems to have been tested and shaped by his criticisms of Kraemer and the Christian theological position he represented. His basic theological position denotes that God is love:

> The 'terrible decree' of Calvinism, against which Wesley so often wrote, ends by destroying the central

> belief of Christianity, which is that God is love, to all men and at all times. (Parrinder, 1977a:59)[60]

The reference to Wesley suggests that his own Methodist theological roots have been important to him in establishing his conviction that God is love. In 1939, he wrote that:

> It is a pity if the whole of Christendom is to be arbitrarily divided into humanists and Calvinists, if there cannot be found a middle way for those who are loyal to the gospel, but wish also to be honest and charitable with regard to others. (Parrinder, 1939:392)

It was his Methodist expression of Arminian faith which provided that middle way for him. Although he has never described it in any detail, it has formed, even if sometimes in implicit, unsystematic and even pedestrian ways, the intellectual and religious atmosphere for his Christian convictions. In 1962, referring to Barth's views and Calvinism in general, Parrinder wrote that 'Most Christians, and in Protestantism many Arminian and Anglo-Saxon thinkers, do not accept such extreme doctrines' (Parrinder, 1977a:47f.).

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[60]Calvin himself called predestination the 'decree to be shuddered at' (*decretum quidem horrendum*), a phrase echoed in the inverted commas in Parrinder's judgement. Actually, the Latin word *horrendum* is better translated as 'awesome'. Calvin's own French translation reads: 'I confess this decree must frighten us' (*doit nous épouvanter*): McGrath, 1994:396. For a measured account of predestination in Calvin's teaching, see Wendel, 1965:263-284. This theme was picked up by John Wesley who, ironically perhaps, echoed Calvin's words and called that aspect of his teaching, 'horrible decrees' (Rack, 1989:450).

Parrinder's judgement upon Barth and other Reformed theologians as being Calvinist rather than Arminian may to some extent be question begging and simplistic, but there is enough truth in it to sting. Turner, smarting, wrote: 'Here I enter debate with a fellow Christian scholar who stands in the Arminian and Methodist tradition and has not been reared with my own Reformed background and influence' (in King and Walls, 1980:162). He seems, on the basis of their shared Christian faith to have hoped for a more sympathetic judgement upon the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition. But Turner overestimated Parrinder's conviction that intra-Christian solidarity is more important than that Arminian and Wesleyan perception of truth which led him to believe in God's presence outside the Christian faith, and to embrace a belief in God's universal love rather than his desire to separate humans into the elect and the damned.

Arminianism dates from the beliefs and writings of the Dutch theologian Jacob Harmensz (c1560-1609), whose name has usually been rendered into Latin as Arminius. Although he remains a shadowy figure whose views are obscure and therefore easily misunderstood, two aspects of his teaching became influential upon the eighteenth century English reformer, John Wesley (1703-1791), and the society of Methodists he founded. The first is an emphasis upon universal sin and universal grace, and the second is the freedom of the will. These depend upon an appropriate christology (Bangs, 1985:332-349). It is the first of these, and particularly the emphasis upon universal grace,

which has inspired so many Methodists who have been involved in framing a theology for a plural world.

For a brief time in England under King Charles I (1625-1649), Arminian views prevailed at court, but during the Commonwealth and after the restoration of the monarchy, others took over. Just before and during Wesley's lifetime, many English people thought Roman Catholicism to be seditious, particularly after the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 which replaced the Roman Catholic James II with his Protestant daughter Mary II (1688-1694) and her husband William IV (1688-1702), and the subsequent failure of the 1715 and 1745 uprisings to restore the Catholic Stuart dynasty. Calvinism became important, not only in Puritanism but in the teachings of the Church of England. Popular Calvinism, as loosely based upon the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564), leader of the reformation in Geneva, as Arminianism was upon the convictions of Harmensz, stressed God's choice of an elect, sometimes so clearly as to affirm that human beings had no choice as to whether they had any control at all over their eternal destiny. Although the popularity of Calvinism in the established church of his day made it respectable, John Wesley inveighed against it. The hymns of his brother Charles (1707-1788) condemn it utterly and promote a form of Arminianism. Parrinder had included a selection of these in his Devotions to the Passion; by Charles Wesley. In fact the very first hymn in that collection begins:

> God of unexampled grace
> Redeemer of mankind... (Parrinder, 1947a:5)

Thus Parrinder's theological education was formed, however inchoately, by a movement which was avowedly anti-Calvinist in its origins. He was not pre-disposed to look with favour on any attempt to restrict God's grace, and would be inclined to condemn as Calvinist any attempt to deny access to God outside Christian faith: for him humankind, not just Christians, is the proper object of God's searching and universal love.

Like Parrinder's, Wesley's theology may be instinctive rather than systematic, and sometimes internally contradictory, but, at its most characteristic and distinctive, in contradiction to the prevailing Calvinism of the day, it advocated a 'Catholic Spirit'.[61] In A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity (1767), Wesley wrote about the centrality of love. The one who possesses this:

> soars above all these scanty bounds, embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies; yea, not only the good and gentle but also the froward, the evil and unthankful. For he loves every soul that God has made, every child of man, of whatever place or nation. And yet this universal benevolence does in nowise interfere with a particular regard for his relations, friends, and benefactors, a fervent love for his country and the most endeared affection to all men of integrity, of clear and generous virtue. (in Whaling, 1981:122)

One interesting result of Parrinder's Wesleyan Arminianism has been his attempt to rehabilitate Pelagius (d. c.410),

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[61]The 'Catholic Spirit' is the title of one of John Wesley's most famous sermons: cf Wesley, 1944:442-456.

a British ascetic monk based at Rome. In an article entitled 'Eternal dilemma of freewill' for the Sunday Correspondent (13/5/90:18), he wrote that Pelagius tackled 'one of the central philosophical dilemmas of religious faith - the problem of how far human beings have free will and how far they depend on the grace of God for good conduct'. Pelagius argued that 'we are born without virtue or vice and it lies with us to do good by the help of divine grace'. Although Parrinder noted the reality of sin in the world, he questioned orthodox notions of original sin:

> Not only has Darwin's theory of evolution undermined the notion of an "original" corruption, but the modern sense of justice and morality gives more approval to the Pelagians than their opponents.

Parrinder condemned Augustine (354-430) for underestimating grace, which Pelagius stressed. This led Augustine to assert that outside of the church there is no salvation, 'a notion that seems to substitute the church for the grace of God'.[62]

Parrinder's championship of Pelagius has not, however, led him to articulate in any systematic way a model for people of other faiths which has emphasised innate human goodness and the need for ethical endeavour within their religious systems. This is perhaps fortunate, since Parrinder, influenced no doubt by the British liberal theology of the

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[62]See also the article on 'Saint Augustine of Hippo' in Parrinder, 1985:524-527.

inter-war years in which he was steeped, misunderstood both Augustine and Pelagius. Pelagius, who believed that humans possess total freedom of the will, condemned utterly those who failed to obey God and serve others whereas Augustine, who affirmed that humanity is universally affected by sin because of the fall of its first parents, made more room for forgiveness and restoration (McGrath, 1994:371-381).

Actually Harmensz denied being a Pelagian, on the grounds that believers depended on the grace of Christ to do what they accomplished (Bangs, 1985:347). Parrinder, like the Wesley brothers before him, was hardly a careful scholar of Harmensz (nor even of Pelagius or Augustine); nor would he claim to be, although his views like Charles' and John's have been formed by the general ethos of Arminianism. John Wesley was accused of embracing Pelagianism[63] after the notorious 1770 Minutes of the Conference of Travelling Preachers, which is the only place where he speaks of Christian goodness as meritorious.[64] Whether Parrinder himself knew of this controversy is impossible to discover from his writings. At any rate, he was more interested in pointing out that the debate about grace and free will is

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[63]Henry Rack suggests that 'many of the eighteenth-century Evangelicals learned their "Calvinism" by experience: the sense of being damned sinners mysteriously chosen for salvation'. Moreover, he thinks it is 'far from clear' how much John Wesley (one may surely include his brother) knew of Calvin, his successors and their Puritan disciples, or even of Augustine and Pelagius, early antagonists on the question of 'free grace' (Rack, 1989:199f.).

[64]The background and course of this controversy is described in Rack, 1989:391f.,454-458.

present in several religions and ideologies, and that the position he represents as Pelagian is the most sensible one to adopt. Indeed, he ends his article not by quoting Pelagius, but rather another important, even archetypal, Englishman, Dr Johnson: "Sir, we know our will is free, and there's an end of 't."[65]

Running as a theme through almost fifty years of John Wesley's life is a recognition of prevenient (in Sermon 85 and elsewhere he called it, 'preventing') grace. This love of God, incarnated in Christ, accepted as saving faith the good works of those whose faith was not explicitly Christian. In this, Wesley reflected the teaching of the Counter-Reformation rather than that of Luther and Calvin, who both use the figure of a bad tree being unable to bring forth good works when they refer to the works of someone not yet justified. The Council of Trent had, however, asserted: 'Whoever shall say that all the works which are done before justification... are truly sins, and deserve the hatred of God... let him be anathema'.[66] Perhaps the most striking example Wesley offers of this theme of God's universal love comes from his sermon 'On Faith' (Wesley, 1876:219-227), written late in his life in 1785:

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[65]In his description of Pelagianism, Parrinder occasionally reveals a somewhat parochial perspective: he noted that Pelagius 'is often regarded as embodying the strength of British practical virtues'.

[66]For a summary of the teaching of the Council of Trent and the doctrinal differences with Protestants, see Davidson, 1987:4-19.

> But many of them [ie the ancient Heathens], especially in the civilized nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion. Yea, and so was that Mahometan, an Arabian, who, a century or two ago, wrote the life of Hai Ebn Yokdan.[67] The story seems to be feigned; but it contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled.

Another more negative theme about the faith of others also ran through John Wesley's work. In Sermon 63, he wrote of Islam: 'how far and wide has this miserable delusion spread over the face of the earth!' (Wesley, nd:278).[68] Actually, although Wesley was not a systematic theologian and was quite capable of contradicting himself, these themes are not mutually contradictory. He never could bring himself to consider whether the faith of people of other religions was

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[67]This story was the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's fictional hero, Robinson Crusoe. Although Wesley was wrong in thinking it was written 'a century or two ago', he was right to believe it fictitious. See further: Cracknell, 1986:168fn17.

[68] John extended his condemnation of other faiths wider than Islam. In his Journal for September 4th 1738, he described a visit to the famous Jewish synagogue in Rotterdam:

> Having waited till past four in the afternoon, we stepped into the Jews' Synagogue, which lies near the water-side. I do not wonder that so many Jews (especially those who have any reflection) utterly abjure all religion. My spirit was moved within me at that horrid, senseless pageantry, that mockery of God, which they called public worship. Lord, do not thou yet "cast off thy people!" But in Abraham's "Seed" let them also "be blessed!"

This passage shows how much Wesley shared the anti-Semitic prejudices of many of his contemporaries. However, it was not his only response to Jews. On April 4th 1737, Wesley had recorded that 'I began learning Spanish, in order to converse with my Jewish parishioners; some of whom seem nearer the mind that was in Christ than many of those who call him Lord'.

nurtured by their tradition; he preferred to talk of 'the inward voice' or some other phrase which avoided this question.

Charles, too, saved some of his best ammunition for Islam:

> The smoke of that infernal cave,
> Which half the Christian world o'erspread,
> Disperse, thou heavenly Light,
> And save the souls by that Imposter led,
> That Arab thief, as Satan bold,
> Who quite destroyed the Asian fold.
> O might the blood of sprinkling cry
> For those who spurn the sprinkled blood!
> Assert thy glorious Deity,
> Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!
> The Unitarian fiend expel,
> And chase his doctrine back to hell.

Invincible ignorance can lead easily to slander. These words betray a simplistic understanding of Muhammad who is portrayed as expounding the same view of the One-ness of God as eighteenth century English Unitarians. Charles Wesley's words are unlikely to persuade thoughtful people of their merit in a less insular world than his own. In 1914, Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), an Englishman who later became famous for his rendering of the Quran into English as <u>The Meaning of the Glorious Koran</u> (1930) and who had spent time abroad in the East, was called upon to sing them in a Church of England service. He felt unable to do so, and moved closer to his conversion to Islam (Clark, 1986:37f.). In fact, John Wesley could also have been speaking for his brother Charles when he admitted, in that same seminal sermon 'On Faith', that 'with Heathens,

Mahometans, and Jews, we have at present nothing to do'. In their lack of practical experience of meeting people of other faiths, the Wesley brothers were quite unlike Parrinder, but the logic of their commitment to God's universal love, even though they did not always follow it to its conclusions, has deeply impressed Parrinder and many other Methodist missionaries and scholars.

2.6 His Methodist Roots: (ii) Christology.

If Parrinder is indebted, in a loose way, for his championship of Pelagius to John Wesley's views on grace and free will, he is similarly influenced by John Wesley's attitude towards the person of Jesus. Christology and not soteriology was at the heart of Wesley's faith.[69] His teaching has been summarised as the so-called 'Epworth Quadrilateral': all need to be saved, all can be saved, all can know they are saved, all can be saved to the uttermost. Yet this rather glib précis dates back only to 1903,[70] and scarcely does justice to Wesley's conviction about how Jesus, and what God has done through him, is central to

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[69]The subordination of a wider interpretation of christology to soteriology has plagued much Christian theology (see Chapter 8.1 and 2). Alister McGrath has recently included John Wesley among those who believe that it is not necessary 'to have a fully *Christian* faith in God in order to be saved' (McGrath, 1994:366f.). Not quite: for Wesley, Christ provides not so much the focus of faith in God as its embodiment. This embodiment permits Christians to recognise truly Christlike lives in other religions than Christianity.

[70]W.B. Fitzgerald, secretary of the Wesley Guild, coined it, and it became popular in the 1920s. See Turner, 1985:249fn9.

Christian faith. John Munsey Turner has suggested, rather, an 'Epworth Triangle':

> the priority of God's universal love; the need for a personal faith; no limitations can be put to God's grace in its effect on humanity given the limitations of living in a body in a fallen world. (Turner, 1985:45)

John Wesley wrestled with the story of Cornelius to discover how God's universal grace is related to Jesus. That account, which comes from Acts 10 and 11, had gripped Wesley for almost half a century. Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army of occupation who, after receiving an angelic visitation, sent for the apostle Peter and was baptised with all his household. The story, however, raises acutely the question whether Cornelius was accepted by God before he knew of Jesus or after. Wesley, following the logic of the account in Acts, saw him as acceptable to God to some extent before Peter came to see him. In the 1745 Minutes of the Conference of the Travelling Preachers,[71] dated August 2nd, he wrote:

> Q.7 Have we duly considered the case of Cornelius? Was not he in the favour of God, when "his prayers and alms came up for a memorial before God;" that is, before he believed in Christ?

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[71]After his conversion in 1738, John Wesley trained and licensed travelling lay preachers to spread his message abroad. Conscious that he needed to monitor and co-ordinate their work, he set up an annual conference for them. The first met in 1744, when there were about forty such itinerants. It was decided that the method of procedure would be by question and answer, and (grievously, for historians) that only conclusions would be recorded, not the debates that preceded them. See further, Rack, 1989:242f..

A. It does seem that he was, in some degree. But we speak not of those who have not heard the gospel.

Q.8 But were these works of his "splendid sins"?[72]

A. No; nor were they done without the grace of Christ.

Q.9 How then can we maintain, that all works done before we have a sense of the pardoning love of God are sin, and, as such, an abomination to Him?

A. The works of him who has heard the gospel, and does not believe, are not done as God hath "willed and commanded them to be done." And yet we know not how to say that they are an abomination to the Lord in him that feareth God, and, from that principle, does the best he can.

In his commentary on the story of Cornelius in Explanatory Notes on the New Testament (1754), Wesley had not changed his mind about the efficacy of pre-justification works, but stressed also the incomparable value of explicit faith in God through Christ. In his notes on Acts 10:35, he wrote:

> But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness-He that first reverences God, as great, wise, good; the Cause, End, and Governor of all things; and, secondly, from this awful regard to Him, not only avoids all known evil, but endeavours, according to the best light he has, to do all things well. Is accepted of him-Through Christ, though he knows Him not. The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying His written word and ordinances or not. Nevertheless, the addition of these is an unspeakable blessing to those who were before, in some measure, accepted: otherwise, God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter. (Wesley, 1950:434f.)

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[72]After his conversion experience in May 1738, Wesley saw pre-justification good works as 'splendid sins', remarkable and edifying but still transgressions. By 1744 he had changed his mind, and recognised a place for human ignorance about God. According to the 1744 Minutes of the Conference of the Travelling Preachers (June 25th, Question 3), he saw repentance as evidenced in 'obeying God *as far as we can*, forgiving our brother, leaving off from evil, doing good, and using his ordinances, *according to the power we have received*' (italics mine).

Wesley's agonisings over the place of Jesus in God's universal grace was hardly related to the world of religions.[73] Rather, it was related to his mission among the 'unchurched' in Britain and Ireland, and to his defence of Arminian over Calvinist interpretations of Christian belief. Despite occasional references to other faiths by the Wesley brothers, there is truth in John Munsey Turner's observation that 'the impact of the reality of God in other religions... was just over [John] Wesley's horizon' (Turner, 1985:47). Yet the brothers' commitment (especially John's) to Jesus as revealing yet not confining in himself the universal love of God has had a profound impact among many Methodists. It seems significant that a such a relatively small Christian denomination as Methodism has in recent years produced so many academics, church leaders and media people who have wrestled positively with the issue of religious pluralism: Wesley Ariarajah, Diana Eck, Frank Whaling, Kenneth Cracknell, Eric Lott and Pauline Webb are just a few examples. Parrinder's mentor, the Primitive Methodist Edwin Smith, wrote, in relation to believers in African traditional faiths, that the missionary:

> does not need to prove God's existence and power; but to bring home to their hearts and conscience that God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a holy and loving God, is his great business. (Smith, 1926a:43)

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[73]Despite the fact that John Wesley had been a missionary in Georgia (1735-37), he was initially unenthusiastic about his follower Thomas Coke's vision of an overseas mission, and implementation of it. See further, Rack, 1989:475-482.

John Munsey Turner has written that:

> Methodism has never clearly defined her 'distinctive emphases' save as they are stated in the *Forty-Four Sermons* of John Wesley and the *Notes on the New Testament*, which according to the Deed of Union of 1932, are 'not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.' Perhaps it was all to the good that the doctrinal standards of Methodism are a book of sermons and a commentary on the New Testament. (Turner, 1985:81)

Certainly, the teachings of the Wesley brothers have provided an atmosphere rather than a rigorous theology for Parrinder's own views. This is confirmed in his recent article, 'Theological Assessments of Other Faiths' (May 1990). Although this was published in *Epworth Review*, a Methodist academic journal, it does not mention the Wesley brothers. It is a pity that Parrinder has not pursued the ambiguities of his Methodist origins more carefully for, in wrestling with them, he might have written a more weighty and considered christology than is found scattered and implied in his works,[74] and that in turn could have led him to construct a significant theology of religions.

Yet from time to time in his writings, Parrinder makes overt references to his Methodist heritage. In particular, in his book Comparative Religion he wrote that:

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[74]Parrinder's christology will be examined more thoroughly in relation to the contemporary debate in Chapter 8.2.

> I belong to the church of which I am a member because I was born into it. That is a plain statement of fact, and it applies to many other people. Its implications are far-reaching. Of course there are many other reasons which I now adduce for belonging to my church. I have a clear idea of what its teachings are, and I think they conform to the ancient and orthodox teachings of the universal church. (Parrinder, 1977a:92)

Tantalisingly, he did not explicitly explore the far-reaching implications he admits. Moreover, his attacks on Kraemer, Barth and Brunner in Comparative Religion imply that other eminent Christians do not conform to the ancient and orthodox teaching of the church, as H.W. Turner realised. Here, Parrinder's wide knowledge of his faith is not matched by a depth of reflection on the implications of intra-religious difference, even though he recognised such divergences.

In fact, the Wesleyan themes of commitment to universal grace and the centrality of Jesus meet with remarkable resonances in Parrinder's work. In particular, how can a christology adequate for a plural world and yet true to Christian claims be articulated, in a global setting which is inter-faith, rather than intra-faith? In many of Parrinder's writings, his depiction of the universal love of God as revealed in Christ has illustrated how close he has been to his Methodist roots. Sometimes he has illustrated this in a specifically Methodist way. For example, in his Mysticism in the World's Religions, he defended the Wesley brothers as mystics, 'at least on a broad definition of mysticism, as communion or union with

God' (Parrinder, 1976a:158). He pointed especially to Charles' hymns as revealing their author to be an 'advanced mystic'. Interestingly, he claimed that Charles' 'devotion to the person of Christ has something of that feminine quality which Protestants have lacked through absence of devotions to the Virgin Mary' (Parrinder, 1976a:159).

Parrinder's own christological formulation, too embryonic to have contributed to any reshaping of the meaning of Jesus in forms appropriate to the contemporary world, depended a great deal upon John's gospel. In his earliest article, although he criticised Kraemer, Barth and Brunner, who focused God's revelatory activity through Jesus, he nevertheless wrote:

> in Jesus Christ we have a Revelation that not only surpasses all others, but that is without parallel; different in quality and kind. The eternal Word, that lighted every man coming into the world, came Himself into the world as a man, 'the Word became flesh'. Here the Johannine witness to the Light that had always been in the world culminates in the wonder of the Incarnation. This, indeed, we may call the Special Revelation; the One, Unique Miracle, occurring 'once for all.' (Parrinder, 1939:393)

In 1962, in a chapter of his book Comparative Religion entitled 'Truth and Error', which follows the one in which criticises Barth's, Brunner's and Kraemer, he pleaded for a positive attitude towards the faith of others, and continued:

> This need not mean that one's own faith is to be held the less firmly or that all religions are of equal value, or equally good ways to the truth. 'The lamps are different, but the light is the same', said the Sufi [Jalal al-Din] Rumi [1207-1273]. Some of the

> lamps may be small, and others darkened with age and in need of cleaning. But there is one true Light, 'which lighteth every man'. (Parrinder, 1977a:60)

Much the same form of words is found at the end of his book An Introduction to Asian Religions, published five years earlier (Parrinder, 1957:136). In his paper for the conference at Somerville College, Oxford, in July 1967, Parrinder referred fleetingly to John's gospel as 'equally tantalizing and profound' as the Bhagavad Gita (in Pittenger, 1968b:20).

Broadly speaking, with regard to its teaching about the faith of others, John's gospel can be taken in two quite different ways. The title of Lesslie Newbigin's commentary on the fourth gospel The Light Has Come illustrates a conservative, even a condemnatory approach. The argument implies, since the light has come in Jesus and 'there is no other light' (Newbigin, 1982:6), other faiths are regarded as of little or even no value. Parrinder chooses the other way of interpreting the evangelist, made famous by Archbishop William Temple (d.1944). For example, in his article 'Updating (*Aggiornamento*) Within and Without', he wrote:

> If John 14:6 ['Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me"'] is taken to indicate the universal Logos, "the light that lighteth every man" which had been mentioned in John 1:9, then a wider viewpoint is obtained. Such a verse, and others like it, may be seen in the context of the Gospel as a whole, not in isolation, and the apparent exclusiveness may be tempered by inclusiveness found elsewhere.

> The late Archbishop William Temple commented on John 1:9 as follows [Temple, 1968:9]: "By the word of God- that is to say by Jesus Christ-Isaiah and Plato, Zoroaster, Buddha, and Confucius, uttered and wrote such truths as they declared. There is only one Divine Light, and every man in his own measure is enlightened by it." (Parrinder, 1990a:52)

He had used the quotation from William Temple before, for example in Comparative Religion (Parrinder, 1977a:51), and in his school textbook, What World Religions Teach (Parrinder, 1968a:193), both first published within a year of each other (1962 and 1963). In a recent article offering 'Theological Assessments of Other Faiths', Parrinder likewise quoted and interpreted Temple's words on John 14:6. (Parrinder, 1990b, 60f.). He noted that he had been asked to write in 'an impersonal and impartial manner' (Parrinder, 1990b:59) but in it he affirmed:

> Jesus was unique as the promised Messiah, which Christians have always believed him to be. He was unique in many of his actions and teachings, and in a lifetime of studying many scriptures I have found no comparable concentration of words and works of goodness and love. He was unique in revealing God in life, death and resurrection, so that God was in Christ [2 Corinthians 5:19] and he that has seen him has seen the Father [John 14:9]. (Parrinder, 1990b:66)

This moving passage is the language of faith, not of academic scholarship. In making his choice of commitment, Parrinder reflected the experience of John Wesley, who also struggled with the meaning of Jesus. Wesley knew that non-Christians were 'saved', because his christology was universal in scope. Precisely because God is as Jesus revealed him to be, he loves all whom he has made. Nevertheless, he felt impelled to add that the addition of

the written word and ordinances of God was 'an unspeakable blessing'. Where, presumably, Parrinder would disagree with him would be that, in his view, Jesus and not the word and ordinances would be the unspeakable blessing. He has written that:

> It is too easy for a Christian to identify the word of God with the Bible... Such an identification of the word with the book is difficult to maintain in the light of modern textual study... Bibliolatry, however well-intentioned, detracts from faith in the living Word. Belief in Christ is the distinctive Christian faith, which may be accepted or rejected, but it provides a standard by which a Christian theologian may appreciate claims to have received words from God. (Parrinder, 1974d:121)

A view of God revealed in Christ as personal and seeking a relationship with human beings has been the plumb-line against which Parrinder has compared other faiths' visions of ultimate reality. We turn, in the following chapter, to his willingness, indeed eagerness, to compare aspects of the faiths of humankind from an Arminian Christian perspective.

3. Parrinder, Christian Comparativist

3.1 His commitment to Comparative Religion.

It is a particularly curious fact about Parrinder's book on Comparative Religion (1962, reprinted 1977) that it defines its subject so imprecisely. In the first chapter, he notes that:

> The very name Comparative Religion has been criticized as unsatisfactory. It is sometimes called 'the Comparative Study of Religions' to be more precise; or simply 'the Study of Religions' to avoid comparison. To call it 'the History of Religions' is also popular, though this title suggests a study of the past only. It is symptomatic of a confused state of affairs that learned journals often have articles on the title and methods of the subject: religionswissenschaft, religionsgeschichte, the phenomenology of religion, and so on. It used to be said that sociologists spent much time discussing methods and nomenclature, in default of a subject. The subject of religion is obviously there, one of the greatest human concerns, but the problem is how to approach it. For the present Comparative Religion is a handy title and it may well be that use will establish what is convenient. (Parrinder, 1977a:10f.)

Even allowing for the fact that Parrinder is writing a popular book and using a style appropriate to his readers, this is an extraordinary passage. It shows how uninterested he has been in methodology, and how little influenced by the increasingly multi-disciplinary approach of Religious Studies.

Frank Whaling's two volume work on Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion (1984 and 1985) traces the story of Religious Studies in the forty years since 1945, which

includes almost all of Parrinder's writing career.[75] However, although Parrinder's writings mention some approaches to religion analysed in Whaling's books other than the comparative one, he does not explore them in any detail. For example, in his discussion of anthropology in African primal religions, he has seen it in a less nuanced way than is described by Tony Jackson, Jarich Oosten or Wouter van Beek (Whaling, 1985:179-275); indeed, in a consistently negative light as inimical to understanding the importance of religion. Parrinder has not kept pace with more recent developments which understand both anthropology and religion as casting light on the role of traditional African cultures.[76]

When Parrinder writes about the origins and meaning of religion, he harks back beyond contemporary debates about methodology to those popular when he was a young man. In his introduction to Man and his Gods (1971), an encyclopedia of the world's religions which he edited, he

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[75]Volume 1, on 'The Humanities', contains six chapters: an 'Introduction'; 'Historical and Phenomenological Approaches'; 'Comparative Approaches'; 'Myths and Other Religious Texts'; 'The Scientific Study of Religion in its Plurality', with 'An Additional Note on the Philosophy of Science and the Study of Religion'; and 'The Study of Religion in a Global Context'. Volume 2, on 'The Social Sciences' contains the following seven chapters: 'Introduction'; 'Psychological Approaches'; 'Sociological Approaches (1) and (2)'; 'Social Anthropological Approaches'; 'Cultural Anthropological Approaches'; and 'Cultural Anthropology and the Many Functions of Religion'. It is clear that these are not watertight compartments; some scholars, though they may be particularly associated with one discipline in the study of religion, have multi-disciplinary interests.

[76]See Chapter 4.1 and 4.4

describes, among other things, debates about the origins of religion, mentioning especially James Frazer's epoch-making The Golden Bough (1890). He then refers to the social importance of religion, citing Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Sigmund Freud (Parrinder, 1971a:9-21).

These and other references in Parrinder's introduction to Man and his Gods show him to be locked into a debate that had moved on by 1971, without him recognising it. Frank Whaling writes that his own:

> two volumes of CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION were conceived as a sequel to Jacques Waardenburg's CLASSICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION published in 1973. Waardenburg had told the story of the development of the study of religion as an academic enterprise from its beginnings in the nineteenth century until the time of the Second World War. The aim of the present volumes is to bring the story up to the present day [1984]. (Whaling, 1984:vii)

In so far as he has been interested in the debate about the study of religion, Parrinder has remained focused on the classical rather than the contemporary approaches. When he was President of the British branch of the International Association for the History of Religions, a special issue of Religion was brought out for its thirteenth congress, held at Lancaster University. It was entitled *The History of Religion: An International Survey* and Parrinder's contribution was 'Religious Studies in Great Britain'. In it, he displayed little awareness of the multi-disciplinary nature of Religious Studies.

His article described a growth of interest in Religious Studies in English universities, then focused on 'Research and Writing', noting, among other things, various works which had recently appeared or were on the point of being published on aspects of the world's religions. Parrinder did briefly mention anthropology and sociology, but declared that 'there is a lack of anthropological techniques in the study of the great historical religions, including Christianity' (Parrinder, 1975b:6), a statement which did not go on to diagnose the source of the illness or to prescribe for its cure; it did not even attempt to convince his hearers that there was a patient needing to be cured. This contrasts with his enthusiastic comments that 'Comparative studies of old and new religions in Africa have been popular', and 'Comparative studies [in wider areas] have been popular' (Parrinder, 1975b:7,8). A final section on 'Teaching' began by affirming that 'Most universities in Britain today have some undergraduate teaching courses on religion, though it may be included under anthropology or humanities as much as under theology' (Parrinder, 1975b:8f.). He then listed universities where such teaching was done, and the subjects taught.

The impression from this article is that Parrinder, although very widely read in current works, and well informed about the study of religion, was not aware of or else not interested in the evolving multi-disciplinary nature of Religious Studies. To be sure, he mentioned sociology, anthropology and the philosophy of religion, but

subsumed them all under the category of comparative religion, which he uses as an umbrella term. Indeed, his article, which was written for a scholarly audience and not a general one as his book Comparative Religion had been, began with the simplistic statement:

> The History of Religions, Study of Religions, Religious Studies, Comparative Study of Religions, popularly called Comparative Religion, is more widely studied in Great Britain today than ever before. (Parrinder, 1975b:1)

Parrinder missed the important point that although the term 'comparative religion' had been used as a general term for the study of other religions,[77] by 1975 a number of scholars were using it in a more exact sense, comparing religions in various ways.

Ironically, Parrinder himself was one such scholar. Although he has often referred to 'comparative religion' in a loose way, he has been a meticulous exponent of its principle of comparing different faiths or aspects of different faiths. He recently wrote, 'I have always espoused the comparative method'.[78]

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[77]This is particularly true of scholars who influenced Parrinder in his early days as a writer. For example, E.O. James book Comparative Religion (1938) is subtitled 'An Introductory and Historical Survey'. But even Eric Sharpe's book on the subject (published in 1975, the same year as Parrinder's article in Religion) describes comparative religion imprecisely as 'the serious and, as far as possible, dispassionate study of material drawn from all the accessible religious traditions of the world' (Sharpe, 1975:xiv).

[78]In a letter dated 13.10.1990.

Parrinder's eagerness to compare religions was one of his earliest convictions. His childhood memories of Ernest Hunt's spiritual odyssey through various forms of Christianity and then into Buddhism made a deep impression upon him.[79] A later and profound influence was Edwin Smith, who provided a foreword to Parrinder's first book, West African Religion (the foreword was written on 15th September 1947).[80] In the course of his career in Africa, Smith branched out from writing about a specific group in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) to tracing a common belief about a Supreme God among sub-Saharan Africans, a conviction which Parrinder came to share, refine and popularise.[81]

Parrinder's first book showed his commitment to the comparative method. His earliest years in Africa had brought him into contact with a number of African tribal groupings, which naturally led him to compare and contrast their beliefs and practices. Andrew Walls has pointed out that:

> in Ivory Coast, he met a little-known branch of the Akan peoples, usually thought of in relation to Ghana, and especially Ashanti; in Dahomey-Togo he was in the heart of an Ewe culture. But Dahomey had once been part of the great empire of Oyo, and contained influences of that mighty Yoruba culture which he was later to know well. He was thus introduced from the beginning to comparison. (in King and Walls, 1980:142)

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[79]See Chapter 1.1.

[80]See Chapters 1.3., 4.1. and 4.2.

[81]See Chapter 4.1

Indeed, Parrinder's doctoral studies, which led to the publication of West African Religion, concentrated on a presentation and comparison of the beliefs and practices of these and kindred peoples, although the revised edition of 1961 added the Ibo group, whose homeland was further east.

Parrinder has continued to embrace the comparative method throughout his career. In fact, it is possible to trace his growing confidence in comparing other religions. In Africa, he moved from a comparison of three West African groupings to a pan-African survey in African Traditional Religion (1954).[82] His first book on another theme was An Introduction to Asian Religions (1957). The following year, his book came out on Witchcraft in African primal faith and Christianity, and since then there have been many wider comparative thematic surveys, especially on worship (1961), mysticism (1976), and sex (1980). It was probably his experiences in Africa which led to an interest in the soul's continuing relationship to God after death; his most important work on this theme has been The Indestructible Soul (1973), which is, however, about Indian not African beliefs. In 1989, he wrote that 'there still seems to be a need for comparative studies, and it is to be hoped that they will be kept up to date and find a wide readership' (Parrinder, 1989a:273).

Parrinder has not only aspired to compare religions, he has succeeded in convincing others that this is his special

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[82]See Chapter 4.1

talent and contribution to Religious Studies. In his section on 'Comparative Approaches' in the book he edited entitled Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Religion volume 1; the humanities, Frank Whaling places Parrinder among those scholars who compare themes using historical data. They 'select a particular theme and ...compare that theme across the religious board' (Whaling, 1984:257). Whaling describes Parrinder as 'by far the most prolific contributor to this type of religious comparison' (Whaling, 1984:258). He notes Parrinder's application of the comparative method to his work in Africa, which paved the way for the work of African scholars such as John Mbiti.[83] He then refers to Parrinder's work in London where:

> he extended his basic method to comparative themes embracing all the world religions. Using the research done by experts in different religious traditions, he drew together and collated their findings concerning a particular comparative theme... In following this path, he has not only broadened the approach he adopted in Africa, he has also continued the tradition of 'comparative monographs' used by his British predecessors [S.G.F.] Brandon [d.1972] and E.O. James, and prepared the way for the work of [John] Bowker, [John] Ferguson, and others.[84] (Whaling, 1984:259)

Whaling then describes Parrinder's method at its simplest in his four small books on 'Themes on Living', in which he gathers passages from religions and civilisations to illustrate major themes and principles of moral living, twenty-one topics in all:

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[83]See further on Mbiti, Chapter 4.2 below.

[84]Whaling particularly mentions Bowker's book, Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World, Cambridge, University Press, 1970.

> principles of right, the divine mind, nature, the nature of man, the ideal man, authority and conscience (*Man and God*, 1973); codes of behaviour, virtues, special virtues, happiness, unselfish action, wrongdoing (*Right and Wrong*, 1973); the family, society and state, race and class, force and war, freedom and responsibility (*Society*, 1973); suffering and evil, death and beyond, the goal, meditation and prayers (*Goal of Life*, 1973). With some exceptions, his selections usually follow a pattern on each topic from classical Europe, the Bible, the Quran, Indian scriptures, and Chinese classics, through to modern writers. Moreover, by cross reference to lists of contents, the teachings of a particular religion and culture can be followed through. (Whaling, 1984:259)

Whaling notes that Parrinder:

> is not merely a generalist, as his work on African religion sometimes illustrates; he does not merely deal with comparative themes as his work on world religions seen as 'wholes' often demonstrates. Nevertheless one of his main contributions has certainly been to extract empirical data from specialised histories of religion, to pass them through the filter of his mind, and to present them imaginatively in comparative themes. Sometimes simply, sometimes subtly, he has used the power of his organising vision to open up new comparative topics and to hint at fresh interreligious connections. He is the most productive exponent of a thematic approach to religious comparison that is not seeking to make typological or structural or theological points. (Whaling, 1984:259f.)

For the most part, this is an accurate and acute summary of Parrinder, though there was no overt influence of Brandon on his works which Whaling's words could imply (Parrinder's commitment to thematic comparisons pre-dated Brandon's major works in this area). Nevertheless, Parrinder has certainly aspired to produce more popular books than Brandon wrote: he has described Brandon's books, Man and His Destiny in the Great Religions (1962), and The Judgment of the Dead: The Idea of Life After Death in the Major

Religions (1967) as 'almost unreadable'. Indeed, Brandon took some pride in telling Parrinder of the intentional obscurity and opacity of these books.[85] But Parrinder would not regard (neither, indeed, would Whaling) the term 'generalist' as necessarily damning. He was, by intention and instinct, a popular writer. His very first book, although it was based on his Ph.D, was aimed as much at intending missionaries and government officials as at scholars (Parrinder, 1961a:vii). From the very beginning he has wanted to write in a popular style and for a wide audience.[86]

3.2 Parrinder, the Christian comparativist.

Where Whaling's analysis is questionable is in its assumption that Parrinder makes no obtrusive theological points. In his introduction to scholars who compare themes using historical data, Whaling writes that:

> Overt value judgments are rarely built into this method, theological, typological, or otherwise. The aim is to compare objectively but sympathetically. The comparative data are taken from the histories of separate religions and grouped together. Ulterior motives of demonstrating superiority, equality, difference or sameness are usually absent. The object of the exercise is to place side by side empirical data, taken from different religions, that illustrate the theme in question and to observe them, to 'compare' them. (Whaling, 1984:257)

To some extent, this is a fair description of how Parrinder would describe his intentions. For example, in one of his

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[85]Interviews with Parrinder, 6/7/1990 and 1/11/1994.

[86]See Chapter 1.7.

earliest books to compare a number of the world's religions,[87] An Introduction to Asian Religions (1957), he wrote that:

> we shall endeavour to divest ourselves of the anti-religious bias of some writers of our time. That we believe in the value and genuineness of some of the religious experiences of followers of the noblest Asian religions cannot be denied. To be fair we must recognize their worth. This, after all, is the traditional catholic and Christian position. God has not left himself without witness, "as certain even of your own poets have said, For we also are his offspring" [Acts 17:28]. (Parrinder, 1957:4)

Parrinder's assumptions here are as interesting as his overt sympathies. By catholic does he mean Roman Catholic, or is he using the word in a looser way? If the former, he would have been more accurate to write of a rather than the catholic position, particularly since the liberalising reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) were some years ahead.[88] Moreover, there have been many Christian attitudes towards other faiths, many of them suspicious or even hostile and condemnatory.[89] But alongside Parrinder's appreciative comments about other faiths is a statement of his Christian position. This becomes clearer in the final paragraph of his book:

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[87]His earliest such comparative study was Religion in an African City (1953), which examined primal faith, Islam and Christianity in the Nigerian city, Ibadan. But this was on a small geographical scale.

[88]The pope who called the council into being, John XXIII, was elected in 1958 (he died in 1963).

[89]See Chapters 2.2, 2.3, and 8.4.

> Throughout this study we have tried to remain impartial and objective, and we do not intend to make a reasoned statement here or to offer a snap judgement. We have preferred to let the facts speak for themselves. It was a Muslim mystic [Rumi] who said, "The lamps are different, but the Light is the same." Some of the lamps have become obscure and give little light; others shine with varying radiance. But there is One True Light "which lighteth every man" [John 1:9]. (Parrinder, 1957:136)

This statement of personal faith about the centrality of Jesus may sometimes be phrased with rather more subtlety in other works, but it remains constant.[90] For example, in his school textbook, What World Religion's Teach (1963, enlarged edition 1968), he dealt with Christianity last of all, and began:

> This study of religion comes to a climax in Christianity, yet this must be done in a fair and factual manner. This is quite difficult, since most readers will have at least some knowledge of the Bible, and it is not proposed to repeat the outlines of the Gospels or the Acts. Some may be convinced Christians, others may not. Then, if it is agreed that one may hold to a particular faith yet study other faiths impartially, how far can one be impartial or detached towards one's own religion? Fortunately our Western tradition of scholarly independence is a great help here. In no other religion, except perhaps Judaism, have scholars found it possible to examine the documents and history of their own faith critically, yet remain believers in that faith. (Parrinder, 1968a:167)

Parrinder's first sentence arises from his belief in Jesus as the divine *logos*.[91] From the perspective of thirty years distance, such confessional views seem particularly out of

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[90]See Chapters 2.6 and 8.2.

[91]See Chapter 2.6.

place in educational material for schools.[92] Yet it is important not to condemn Parrinder anachronistically. His involvement in the setting up of the Shap Working Party on World Religions lent it the prestige of his name in its earliest years. Those present-day teachers of religious education who eschew and condemn every sort of confessional approach to teaching in schools have developed and refined Parrinder's commitment to a sympathetic approach to other faiths, which was remarkably open in the 1960s, whatever criticisms may now be levelled at its details.

Moreover, although his comparison of other faiths may be seriously faulted in that, at least potentially, it imposes alien meaning upon other ways of believing, it has its strengths. Among other reasons for the popularity of his works[93] among Christians is precisely the Christian faith which informs Parrinder's writings. Cautious readers feel reassured by Parrinder's commitment to the person of Jesus. His works address an audience who would be wary of a more 'objective' perspective upon the faith of others. (This is not of course to deny that they have been studied with profit by more adventurous readers.)

Even so, some of his less discerning contemporaries who taught not in schools but in universities have been very

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[92]Equally, from a perspective of three decades distance, Parrinder's assumption that 'most readers [of What World Religions Teach] will have at least some knowledge of the Bible' seems over-confident.

[93]See Chapter 1.7.

opposed to linking the teaching of Religious Studies to that of Christian theology, in whatever ways. For example, Trevor Ling, when Professor of Comparative Religion at Manchester, was reluctant to teach students from the Manchester theological colleges, on the grounds that their Christian confessional training precluded them from a dispassionate study of other world faiths. His predecessor in the Manchester chair, S.G.F. Brandon, although less antipathetic to seminarians, observed that:

> For too long it [Religious Studies] was regarded as a handmaid to Theology, concerned primarily with the task of showing how other religions were destined to find their completion in Christianity. This theological involvement inevitably resulted in the evaluation of Comparative Religion as a discipline based on theological presuppositions and with confessionist interests. But now, due to a variety of causes, the claim of Comparative Religion to be considered as an academic discipline in its own right, concerned with the scientific investigation and assessment of the relevant data, is generally acknowledged. (Brandon, 1970:1)

There is force in this, but two reservations can be made. First, some writers, like Brandon himself, who sat lightly to his Anglican orders in later years, may be telling us more about their own spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage than of the appropriateness of a fruitful relationship between Religious Studies and theology when they distance other scholars as well as themselves from theological roots. Secondly, the study of religion is not simply 'concerned with the scientific investigation and assessment of the relevant data'. It is to do with peoples' deepest commitments, including scholars'. For theists it includes

theology, reflecting upon the will and (at least for Christians) the nature of God.

Although Whaling's analysis of scholars who compare themes using historical data recognises that they make presuppositions, it does not sufficiently recognise the theological assumptions of someone like Parrinder or even John Bowker.[94] Whaling writes that:

> Although dispassionately intended, this comparative method is not without its presuppositions. The selection of the theme, the language used in the study, the separation of the illustrative data from their historical context, and the notion that religious comparison is 'objective,' are all assumptions that are not necessarily self-evident. It is perhaps no accident that it is out of Britain, with her empirical tradition, that much of this type of comparison has emerged. (Whaling, 1984:255)

Whaling does not place Parrinder in a section on 'Comparative Religion and Theology', presumably because it deals with more creative theologians such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith (b.1916), Robert Charles Zaehner (1913-1972) and Raimundo Panikkar (b.1918). Nevertheless, Parrinder's eagerness to compare religions arises out of his Christian experience and reflects his Christian concerns.

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[94]For example, Bowker writes about Islam in his recent thematic book The Meanings of Death:

> Islam rests, as the other major religions do not, on one literal and inerrant picture of the final outcome of human lives beyond death. (Bowker, 1991:128)

Bowker seems, uncharacteristically, to be exercising an overtly Christian theological judgement on Islam, or even some personal spleen or prejudice here. Actually, the variety of assertions and (sometimes) debate among Muslim modernists and others about this matter has been a lively one (eg Ali, 1922:188-203).

His conviction that it is possible to compare religions could be seen to be challenged not only by teachers of Religious Studies anxious to establish their subject as a separate discipline and not simply a handmaid of Christian theology, but also by the attitude of Barth and his followers towards revelation. In his second book, West African Psychology (1951; though it was written between 1946 and 1949) Parrinder quoted, disapprovingly, words of W. H. Newell:

> The Barthian point of view which denies general revelation outside Christianity is reinforced from anthropology, because such teaching as that of Confucius on the family can no longer be regarded as pre-Christian by the grace of God, but as presenting the family as an essential unit in a certain form of social structure. The fact that certain common beliefs resemble certain concepts in Christianity is merely a superficial accident and cannot be used as a basis of evangelization without a very grave danger of obscuring the Christian message.[95]

Parrinder protested against Newell's position:

> One might conclude from this doctrine of the function of religion in society that comparisons cannot be drawn between one religion and another, for there are always differences of environment; and there could be no points of contact, nor any development of the lower into the higher.[96] The task of comparative religion and

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[95]From the article '"Functional" Social Anthropology and Christian Missionary Method' in the International Review of Missions, XXXVI:256; quoted in Parrinder, 1951a:212.

[96]Once Parrinder left Africa, and the world of primal religion, he was less inclined to rely on language which talked of the lower and the higher. In Man and His Gods (1971), Parrinder wrote that 'Clearly many of these assumptions [about developments from "primitive" to "higher" religions] were unfounded, biased, or incapable of proof' (Parrinder, 1971a:16). Even in Africa, he was among the first scholars to avoid using belittling language: See

> anthropology would then be restricted entirely to description. But we may object that while description is invaluable, yet it isolates and makes unreal the religion unless some comparisons are made with other religions, and some points found for development. (Parrinder, 1951a:212f.)

Newell missed three crucial points, and so did Parrinder. First, since Barth was not writing about the religions of the world, it is a moot point as to whether, and if so how, his theological perspective on recent European history could be transferred so easily to Confucianism and other world religions.[97] Secondly, (since some of Barth's followers, especially Kraemer, did in practice, compare religions, if only to denigrate them in comparison with the revelation given in Christ) it is hard to understand why 'common beliefs' should be 'a superficial accident', when a more generous doctrine of grace might more credibly explain certain similarities.

Finally, Newell assumed that the theological perspective is the sole or at least controlling interpreter of other faiths. In the forty years since he wrote these words, it has become easier for many students of religions to accept the possibility that a variety of perspectives can throw clearer light upon ways of faith and culture than a single viewpoint. He was not dealing with an either/or situation: theology (though not necessarily that of Barth's school),

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Chapter 4.2.

[97]Parrinder's failure to explore in any detail the historical basis of Barthian theology is addressed in Chapter 2.3.

anthropology (Newell might have been as or more exact if he had written, sociology), and other disciplines can all offer fruitful ways of interpreting a Chinese (or some other) way of life.

In practice, although Parrinder is not afflicted by quite so narrow a theological tunnel vision as Newell, a different theological position has been the controlling vision by which he has compared and assessed the faiths of humankind. He, too, does not range widely across the discipline of Religious Studies, but has collated, catalogued and compared the religions of humankind from his perspective as a Methodist Christian. He assumes that God, as he is known by a Christian belief in Jesus, is discernible in the faith of others. As we have observed, this would make him the object of suspicion to many scholars of religion since, as Whaling observes, 'the general tendency since World War II has been for the study of religion to attempt to distance itself from theology' (Whaling, 1984:177). Here Whaling's words are especially perceptive (even though he was writing of comparativists whose major area of concern has been theological, among whom he did not include Parrinder):

> The attitude on the part of some comparative religionists [one might add, or of any others who share it] that any theological input must necessarily be unhelpful is unworthy. The research must be judged by its fruits not by ideological presuppositions on the part of comparative religionists [or others]. (Whaling, 1984:181)

3.3 Parrinder: an agent of imperialism?

It has not just been other comparative religionists who have suspected the ideological presuppositions of some of their ilk. During Parrinder's years in West Africa and before, many scholars of religion were involved in government service. For example, R.S. Rattray, whose book on the Ashanti was a source of inspiration to Parrinder,[98] had been in the Gold Coast Political Service, and then taught in an Anthropological Department in Ashanti which was set up by the Colonial Office and the government in the Gold Coast (Rattray, 1923:6). Parrinder himself was never directly involved with the colonial authorities in either British or French West Africa. The point is, however, that since some scholars were agents of imperialism in the colonies or even in independent countries like Iran, or could be presented as such, then others could be tainted by association.

In particular, R.C. Zaehner's career raises the question of the credibility of European and American scholars of comparative religion working at the end of western imperial rule throughout much of the world. According to Ervand Abrahamian, Professor of History at Baruch College in the City University of New York, Zaehner's work for MI6 in Iran helped to bring about the coup of 1953, which overthrew the premier Mohammed Mossadeq (d.1957) and restored the

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[98]See Chapter 4.1.

unpopular Pahlavi dynasty to the Peacock throne.[99] Zaehner himself admitted that he 'had been in various forms of Government service abroad in which truth is seen as the last of the virtues and to lie comes to be a second nature' and that, when he took up his appointment in 1953 to the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religion and Ethics in the University of Oxford, he was 'freshly returned... from a career of professional lying' (Zaehner, 1970:6).

Although Parrinder has never been suspected of having been involved politically in the structures of empire or of British or French domination elsewhere, it is important to ask whether he displayed an imperial mindset. Did he assume the central importance of Jesus as part of a package which included the superiority of western civilisation as a whole, as well as its dominant religion?

The evidence suggests that Parrinder's views about the uniqueness of Christ arose out of his personal faith, and

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[99]Abrahamian writes that:

> The central figure in the British strategy to overthrow Mossadeq was another academic [he also names Professor Anne Lambton], Robin [sic for Robert] Zaehner, who soon became professor of Eastern religions and ethics at Oxford. As press attaché in Iran during 1943-47, Zaehner had befriended numerous politicians, especially through opium-smoking parties. Dispatched back to Iran by MI6, Zaehner actively searched for a suitable general to carry out the planned coup. He also used diverse channels to undermine Mossadeq... [and] wooed away a number of Mossadeq's associates...'. (Abrahamian, 1993:119)

Abrahamian consulted Foreign Office documents kept at the Public Records Office; although he mistakes Zaehner's Christian name, his sources are sound.

not from any over-confident assumptions about the historic importance of either Britain or France as imperial powers. It would be anachronistic to expect him to have adopted a kind of liberation theology. Indeed, he has not written extensively or profoundly about matters of political and economic importance to the people whose religion he has described, either in Africa or elsewhere. That has not been his aim. Nevertheless, he has condemned the 'arrogant and barbaric ways' of the West , noting that 'the superiority of a white skin is not obvious to everybody', and particularly rebuking, as 'worst of all, in both African and Asian eyes', the inhospitableness of Westerners (Parrinder, 1977a:112f.). Moreover, he has occasionally criticised aspects of the imperial system, though without any sense of guilt for having been involved in it, which some post-imperial writers require. For example, in his article 'The Salvation of Other Men' (1973), he observed that:

> In modern times commercial overseas exploitation and aggressive imperialism not only accompanied Christian missions but added their taint to missionary methods and propaganda. Militarism and imperialism are still too common in hymnology, and it is instructive to compare the bellicose 'Onward, Christian soldiers' (dishonest as well-'one in doctrine'!), by an Anglican parson whose life spanned most of the British imperial era (1834-1924),[100] with the pre-imperial 'Soldiers of Christ, arise',[100] which simply paraphrased Paul's imagery of defence against spiritual evils. Criticism of Western European aggressiveness, then, is not a product of squeamish modern suburban Christianity but a recovery of New Testament attitudes to which non-suburban Tolstoy, Gandhi, Luthuli and others have

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[100]Characteristically, Parrinder refers here to a hymn of Charles Wesley.

> directed us. Western European Crusades, Inquisitions, imperialism and racialism can be seen today as indefensible and obstacles rather than aids to the progress of good news about universal salvation. (Parrinder, 1973c:191)

It would be difficult, then, to claim that Parrinder's historical context led him to assume a general superiority of West European countries over other cultures, and therefore of Christianity over the religions embedded in them. His Christian faith, not any imperial vision, has impelled him to study, assess and learn from the faiths of humankind. Certainly, he has not seen his overt faith as a deterrent to understanding other religions but as a necessary precondition. In his book, Worship in the World's Religions, he wrote:

> There is no attempt here... to suggest that all religions are of equal value or can make a vague synthesis... The need today is for a fair and factual understanding of the facts of other religious beliefs and ways of worship... To do this it is valuable to have religious faith oneself. An atheist, who looks upon all religion as superstition, cannot hope to enter into the spirit of other faiths as can a man of religion. Religion is such a personal matter that it makes a great deal of difference if the student has a faith of his own. (Parrinder, 1974a:13f.)

It is Andrew Walls' opinion that Parrinder's missionary credentials, rather than being a hindrance, were a positive advantage to him:

> The nature of his work as a missionary [with breaks, from 1933 to 1946] meant that he was day by day existentially committed to religion, and the religion of the people where he lived. It is a recurrent theme of Parrinder's works that religion can best understand religion. Far from religious commitment being a disqualification for impartial, unbiased enquiry, it can be an entrance gate: it at least presupposes the

> reality of the subject matter. It also tends to direct one's attention to central issues; and Parrinder has never been afraid to go to the heart of things, the questions that really *bother* people in religion. (in King and Walls, 1980:143)

3.4 Why study religions comparatively?

Why has Parrinder deemed it important to study other religions? At one level, he believes that the study of different faiths teaches its own lessons, which do not have to be underlined or spelled out. In his An Introduction to Asian Religions (1957), he recognised that:

> there are those who are suspicious of any kind of comparison of religious systems. There was an old type of Christian argument which sought to display the excellencies of its own faith, to the discredit of others. This sort of apologetic is suspect in many places to-day. Here at least we shall be content to state the facts as fairly as possible, and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. The Christian will know how to make his own comparisons. The non-Christian will not be attracted by biased propaganda. (Parrinder, 1957:2)

Parrinder was making the theological point that the truth of Christian faith speaks for itself, and does not need to condemn others. But there is also a wider point implicit here: studying other faiths teaches lessons that students can glean for themselves without any emphasis by writers or teachers. Two of his books, A Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions (1972), and A Dictionary of Religious and Spiritual Quotations (1990), are collations of interesting and informative material. Although there is no overt comparison in them, Parrinder's assumption seems to be that information leads naturally to comparison. Indeed, the

structure and content of the material makes certain assumptions. For example, in the latter work, under 'Prophets' Parrinder includes quotations from Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Classical, and African Traditional Sources, as well as other non-religious sources such as George Eliot, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare. Readers are also directed to sections on 'Shamans' and 'Mysticism' (Parrinder, 1992a:68f.).

It is impossible to draw any coherent theory of prophecy from his choice: indeed, unlike his other sources, Eliot's quotation, from her novel Middlemarch, roundly condemns the phenomenon by declaring that 'Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous'. Nevertheless, the very fact of collating material from different religious and secular sources prompts the reader to ask why this material was chosen and not some other. It also assumes that it is proper and meaningful to put such material together, a view not shared by everybody. Occasionally, the impression is given that Parrinder, in arranging data, has no coherent methodology but has simply put together his favourite bits.[101]

However, Parrinder has not always been simply content to collect and arrange material from divers religions and other sources, assuming, controversially, that it will speak for itself. His most pithy statement of the purpose

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[101]See, further, on this point about Parrinder's collation of material, Chapter 3.5.

of comparative religion is given in the article And Is It True? (1972) written up from his inaugural lecture as Professor of the Comparative Study of Religions in King's College London:

> the Comparative Study of Religions is needed, to enlarge our horizons, correct our own apologetic, and bring a wider knowledge of the nature of religion. (Parrinder, 1972c:19)

His insights into the purpose of comparing religions are scattered among many of his works, but many of the most important are found in his little book called Comparative Religion (1962, reprinted 1977). A look at its chapters indicates his concerns. Apart from the first[102] they are: 'The Confrontation of Religions'; 'Tolerance'; 'The Attitude to Other Religions'; 'Truth and Error'; 'Problems of Propaganda'; 'Syncretism or Adaptation?'; 'Complementary Religions'; 'Revival and Criticism'; and 'Tasks of Comparative Religion'.

In the first two chapters, Parrinder argued for an end to the confrontations of the past and present and for a spirit of tolerance. One of his most telling points was that 'in its relationships with other religions Christianity has often been checked rather than advanced through the harsh methods used by its missionaries' (Parrinder, 1977a:36). So new attitudes are required (Chapter 3). He mentioned

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[102]The first chapter is entitled 'Comparative Religion' and its major point has been discussed in Chapter 3.1.

Zaehner's Christian interpretation of other faiths, but rejected it:

> Zaehner regards the religions of Asia as preparatory to Christianity where 'the highest insights of both the Hindus and the Buddhists are fulfilled.'[103] But to regard other religious truths as subservient to one's own smacks of patronage. It is to take too narrow a view of religion, as if all that mattered was one's own viewpoint. That multitudes have found help and inspiration in other religious traditions must be taken into account. (Parrinder, 1977a:54)

This is a particularly interesting comment, since it seems to conflict with Parrinder's own theological position that Jesus is the *logos* of God, the clear light as opposed to murkier lamps. There may not be as much conflict as at first seems; it all depends on how far he was able to recognise that Christians can still learn from others, and whether he was able to let other religions speak for themselves, whatever his personal convictions.[104] Certainly Whaling correctly observed that one of Zaehner's roles was that of a 'fulfilment theologian'; sometimes he 'tended to treat Hinduism as an object to be studied independently of those who practiced (sic for practised) it' (Whaling, 1984:195). Parrinder has not been quite such a blatantly christian-ising theologian.

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[103]This quotation, which Parrinder does not cite, comes from Zaehner, 1958:193.

[104]This tension between 'objective' presentation of material about other faiths, married to Parrinder's deep Christian faith, is a recurrent theme of this thesis. See, in particular, Chapter 8.

This tension between believing in the importance, even the central importance, of the Christian religion, yet being willing to learn from other faiths, was more deftly handled in his school textbook, What World Religions Teach (1963), published one year after Comparative Religion. Parrinder, in two chapters (23 and 24), outlined 'What we can learn from other faiths', and then 'What Christianity offers'. In the first area he included beliefs which Christians have neglected as well as 'further wisdom': the greatness of God; the immanence or nearness of God; the service of God for his own sake; the perspective of eternity; methods of meditation and yoga; and peace (Parrinder, 1968a:192-199). In the second, he proposed: the unity and diversity of God; revelation in Christ; the teaching of Jesus; cross and resurrection; social service; and a universal religion (Parrinder, 1968a:200-207). What is significant about these two chapters is both a recognition that God is present outside Christianity, and a conviction that Christ has something special to offer all people. However, this does not preclude Christians from learning from other faiths; rather, it encourages them to do so.

In Parrinder's view, as expressed in his book Comparative Religion, the study of other religions must be done between persons, not 'abstract systems', and with a world audience in mind, not a parochial one. It requires 'a spirit of grace and charity'. Far from undermining faith, the investigation of other faiths can strengthen one's own (Parrinder, 1977a:64-66). In later chapters, Parrinder

argued against syncretism, 'yet it is possible that there are elements in other religions which may be borrowed' (Parrinder, 1977a:87). He accepted the theory that religions are complementary rather than competitive, 'each of them existing to supply some element lacking in the other' (Parrinder, 1977a:94), and urged that it is more important to seek affinities than differences (Parrinder, 1977a:95). Although there are important differences between Faiths:

> if the religions can side with each other, instead of trying to destroy each other, then their combined forces, appeal and insight, should provide sufficient armoury to pierce the indifference and antagonism of modern man to the claims of religion. (Parrinder, 1977a:100)

He suggested that:

> the ideal relationship between religions is that in which they support all that is good in each other's faith and unite against all that is bad. The aim of dialogue today is not just proselytism... The service of religion today is to preserve freedom for man. (Parrinder 1977a:102f.)

He emphasised the fact that very often others regard the 'Christian' West as immoral and divided into denominational factions. So:

> if we recognize that other religions stand in need of reform, this cannot be done in a spirit of superiority as if we needed no reform in our own religion. We need it as much as they do. We can learn from other religions, and from the moral and religious criticisms they offer to us. We can learn from their criticism to seek the essence of our own faith better. We can learn from their religion. (Parrinder, 1977a:115f.)

The repetition of the word 'learn', like a preacher's device to underline an important point his listeners must hear and live out, points to what is perhaps the heart of his book: the need for Christians to learn from people of other faiths. On the last page, he emphasised that 'it is important for the layman to be fair and sympathetic in his study and show that religion can be a uniting rather than a devisive (sic for divisive) force' (Parrinder, 1977a:128).

Indeed, one of Parrinder's greatest achievements has been to recognise that other religions are not temporary phenomena, and to seek to persuade other Christians not only of that fact but also that it is possible, indeed desirable, to value them:[105]

> It is, then, no longer possible to ignore the existence of non-Christian religions or the reforms taking place in them. Recognition of this fact is essential for Christian missions, but also for the Church as a whole. The hard fact of the existence of different faiths, to which hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings are devoted, must be recognized. 'The evangelization of the world in this generation', once the bold cry of the Student Christian Movement, has not been realized in any more than the general sense of preaching the gospel in nearly every land and making groups of converts in the more favourable ones. This is not meant to deny the missionary task of the Church, which has been implicit since the first century, but different methods are needed; and certainly it must be seen that Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and the like, are here to stay, at least for centuries yet. (Parrinder, 1961b:117)

In the article from which this passage comes (an Anglican journal, *The Modern Churchman*), Parrinder was writing for

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[105]See Chapter 7.2.

a Christian readership, many of whom would have been clergymen. That probably explains why he used expressions like 'the hard fact'; hard, that is, for his audience, not something he himself found difficult to accept. Perhaps it also explains why when he referred to the missionary task of the church, he did not elaborate:[106] he was in fact going a long way towards denying it in any sense which would be meaningful or acceptable to many of his readers, but could bring himself to articulate this lest they failed to cope with his final comment about the longevity of other religions. Actually, considering that the clergy are often most resistant to shifting their perceptions about doctrine and practice, Parrinder's views were rather bold, encouraging his readers to admire and learn from other faiths, rather than ignorantly to disparage them.

In comparing other religions, what, if anything, does Parrinder believe constitutes their essence? This has been most clearly handled in his lecture 'The Great World Religions: Similarities and Differences' written for the fifth ICUS (The International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences) held in Washington, DC, on November 26th-28th 1976. He picked out three areas upon which the teachings and ethos of all religions converge: The Spiritual World; Individual and Society; and, Values and Goals.

Under the first section, he argued that '"The spiritual world" seems to be a general religious concept, but with

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[106]See Chapter 8.3.

many different interpretations' (Parrinder, 1977c:29). Characteristically, although he discussed differences, he emphasised affinities:

> in summary it can be affirmed that the major religions, at least, believe in a superhuman spirit, a conscious intelligence, that created and sustains the world but is transcendent to it, and who is revealed through mediatorial figures. (Parrinder, 1977c:33)

Again, in the second section, Parrinder underlined convergences between religions:

> Religious experience, right across the spectrum of faiths, seems to challenge the merging of the individual into either the Absolute or society. Religious believers hold that there is a superhuman power that has an authority above all that society can claim, and that power is revealed in the experience of individuals. (Parrinder, 1977c:36)

Similarly, in relation to 'Values and Goals': 'the divine being also has a concern for the community, for the individual in society, and for the redemption of society' (Parrinder, 1977c:36).

Parrinder concluded his paper by affirming that:

> Religions, therefore, provide ideals for mankind in deliverance from evil and establishment of justice and peace. There are many other elements of religious life and teaching, too numerous to mention, but perhaps the three elements which have been singled out here may provide scope for further discussion on the contribution of religion to the understanding of life and the welfare of mankind.[107] (Parrinder, 1977c:39)

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[107]Perhaps, in emphasising this, there is an echo of the third point of what John Munsey Turner called the 'Epworth Triangle': 'no limitations can be put to God's grace in its effect on humanity given the limitations of living in a body in a fallen world'. (Turner, 1985:45, and Chapter 2.6)

3.5 Foci for comparing religions.

The paper for the fifth ICUS is important in revealing Parrinder's strengths as a writer who focuses on issues that matter to people and who inspires them, in comparing religions, to seek elements by which they can order and live out their lives. However, it also shows his weakness in, to a great extent, defining world religions by the presence of God or god-like figures to whom reverence and worship are made.

In his lecture, 'And Is It True?', published in 1972, Parrinder had posed the question:

> Since the nineteenth century, at least, much has been written about the definition of religion. What is it? And subsidiary to it, must it imply belief in or worship of a God? (Parrinder, 1972c:19)

He referred, as an illustration, to Scientology. After a court case in Britain, the Lord Chief Justice and his colleagues in 1969 declared Scientology not to be a religion because it had no object of worship. Parrinder observed that:

> The learned judge [Mr Justice Ashworth] quoted the definition of Worship from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as, according to the transcript given to me: 'the actions or practices of displaying reverence or veneration to a being regarded as Divine by appropriate rites or ceremonies'... But reference to the *O.E.D.* shows that the above quotation is incomplete since it gives; 'reverence or veneration paid to a being *or power* regarded as *supernatural or* divine' (my [ie Parrinder's] italics). This is a careful definition, taken from the fuller *New English*

> *Dictionary*, and traceable back at least to 1921. (Parrinder, 1972c:19)

Parrinder noted that Scientology has 'some of the trappings of religion: public Sunday services, with gowned choirs, and ministers in clerical collars wearing crosses' (Parrinder, 1972c:20).[108] Yet it does not claim to be Christian and has only a:

> vague and occasional reference to God, who is a 'thetan', a soul, like others. But the numinous 'object' appears to be the founder of the movement, Ron L. Hubbard, who is perhaps on the way up to beatification or even deification. His picture is in most rooms, like Big Brother. (Parrinder, 1972c:20)

Parrinder's abiding interest in devotion to God or god-like figures as the focus for comparing the world's religions is one we shall explore in later chapters. His recourse to the doctrine of Jesus as the divine *logos* means that, in locating other such figures elsewhere in the world's religions, he has an analogical basis of comparison.[109] His interest in the importance of such a Being or beings probably arose from his early experiences of primal faith in Africa. The first three parts of his fourfold classification of West African belief were belief in a supreme being, in chief divinities and in divinised

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[108]See further, Parrinder, 1977d:1-9; and Parrinder, 1987a:166-170.

[109]Buddhism is much more challenging than Scientology with respect to Parrinder's thesis that religion is concerned with reverence to God or god-like figures. This is discussed in Chapter 7.1.

ancestors.[110] Yet his work on Indian religion raised it most acutely.[111]

Parrinder's interpretation raises as centrally important to other chapters of this thesis the question of whether he overemphasises or even invents the presence of such beings, and thus distorts religions he compares with Christianity, or aspects of them.

3.6 Worship in the World's Religions.

Parrinder's willingness to compare over a wide religious field can also be seen in his school-textbooks, his Religion in Africa (1969; reprinted in 1976 as Africa's Three Religions), and also his book, The World's Living Religions (1964; revised 1974). More interesting in revealing his presuppositions about religion are his three studies of worship, mysticism and sex in the world's religions. In the last section of this chapter, we shall look at the first of these surveys, to see his aims and achievements.

Worship in the World's Religions was written rather earlier than the other two thematic books. It first appeared in 1961 (reprinted 1974), whereas Mysticism in the World's Religions came out in 1976, and Sex in the World's

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[110]See Chapter 4.1.

[111]See Chapter 7 *passim*, but especially 7.5.

Religions in 1980.[112] In some ways, the first book shows an uncertain touch. Although all three subjects are wide and therefore need clear definition, Parrinder is least successful in achieving this in his book on worship.

He defined worship 'in the broad sense of what is seen and shared by the laity' (Parrinder, 1974a:12). This proves to be too wide a definition. For example, in his section on the Jains, 'Prayer and Worship' form one of five sub-sections. It comes third. The others are: 'The Jinas'; 'Doctrine'; 'Temples'; and, 'Festivals', comprising a short eleven page summary of the religion rather than concentrating on Jain worship (Parrinder, 1974a:62-62).

In other places in his book, certain important figures are mentioned with tantalising brevity, and with scant regard to their importance to the issue of worship. For example, he observed that:

> Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) had perhaps as great an influence on modern Indian religious life as on its political fortunes. His application of the principle of non-violence... has been of lasting effect. He sought freedom for the outcastes (Harijans) to enter temples. He shared in the growing appreciation of other religions which was apparent in his day, but sought rather to widen and purify Hinduism from within than change it for another faith. (Parrinder, 1974a:60)

This is too general and, indeed, irrelevant an account to be of great help in defining or explaining Hindu worship.

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[112]The second of his trilogy, on mysticism, will be discussed in Chapter 7.5; and the last, on sex, in Chapter 5.5.

In this passage, Parrinder used two words which he could have developed to deepen an understanding of Gandhi's religious importance.[113] *Mahatma*, meaning 'Great Soul', is a title which raises interesting questions about how and why Gandhi became a figure of devotion to many of his followers; Parrinder did not examine them, even though they are relevant to his work, and what he wrote is not. Moreover, *harijan* means 'beloved of God', a name which Gandhi gave to outcastes to improve their status but which even at the time was seen as unhelpfully patronising by some of those upon whom it was bestowed.[114] The impression is that Parrinder was keen to offer useful information not strictly within the remit of his title; his material often raises more questions than it answers because of the brevity of its wide-ranging comments.

Expanding on his definition of worship, Parrinder wrote that:

> Concepts of God and other spirits have been thought important for this study, because the God in which a man believes, and his nature as revealed in doctrine and myth, inevitably affects his worship. So efforts have been made to show how the deity appears to faith and devotion. (Parrinder, 1974a:13)

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[113]The most perceptive one volume biography of Gandhi in English is by Judith Brown (1989), Gandhi, New Haven, Yale University Press.

[114]His frosty relations with Dr Ambedkar, the leader of the untouchables, are recorded in Brown, 1989:265ff.

One might expect this, given his interpretation of religion. Yet such an understanding caused him problems with (among others) Jain and Chinese beliefs:

> Jainism opposes the argument for the existence of God which maintains that this faith is necessary to explain the world, on the analogy that the thing made implies a maker... This is all very well for philosophy, but complete atheism would be death to religion... If there is no divine creator in Jainism, still there are the Jinas, the omniscient lords who have overcome all faults... Many gods and goddesses, indeed, have found their way into Jainism. (Parrinder, 1974a:64)

Parrinder argued that 'Confucianism was not properly a religion, but an ancestral cult or at most state-worship, [whereas] Taoism can claim to be the truly native and personal religion of China, its original contribution to the religious development of the world' (Parrinder, 1974a:143). He asseverated that 'Confucius was a teacher of moral and social doctrines and not of religion, despite what later ages tended to make of him' (Parrinder, 1974a:141). So although he could (and did) point to the fact that Confucius has been claimed as divine at various stages of Chinese history (Parrinder, 1974a:142), he did not accept Confucianism as a religion with its founder as a divinised hero. But he was careful to note that 'Lao Tzu [the founder of Taoism] was deified under the title "Emperor of Mysterious Origin", and formed a triad with two other gods' (Parrinder, 1974a:145).

Why his antipathy to Confucianism, which could serve as a religion just as well as Taoism under Parrinder's

definition of god-like figures to whom reverence is made? The answer seems to lie in the fact that, as well as such reverence, more is needed, in his opinion, to define a religion. That extra is 'personal religion', the veneration of God or the god-like figures in each religion, not simply the cold and impersonal acceptance of 'moral and social doctrines'.[115]

Yet it is doubtful whether Confucianism is any more austere a religion than, for example, Jainism. Parrinder's treatment of both faiths underlines the fact that his definition of religion is inadequate to do justice to the richness of the world's diverse faiths. It is not intrinsically wrong, but is simply imposed too rigidly upon some traditions, and viewed from too Christian a perspective. Moreover, it needs supplementing with further definitions; religions are complex phenomena which do not open their secrets only to one key.

Parrinder is at his best in Worship in the World's Religions in some of his descriptions of what actually happens in places of worship. For example, writing of traditional Japanese worship, he recorded that:

> The daily worship in the Shinto shrine is all performed by the priests. The green branches are renewed, offerings made, and ritual performed to the accompaniment of brief clapping of hands. It is very quiet, the priests gliding in and out with gentle footsteps. Shintoists are proud of the quietness and solemnity of the rituals, which reflect both its

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[115]This is emphasised above all in his criticism of monism. See, especially, Chapter 7.5.

> ancient character and the relation of the official rites to solemn court assemblies. (Parrinder, 1974a:160)

One imagines Parrinder, the born teacher, noting down what he sees, and savouring writing about it. Certainly, the reader almost feels to be in the temple. Even if much of the description is tantalisingly vague (why are green branches renewed?; what offering is made?; what ritual is done?), he or she is inspired to find out more and enter deeper into the experience. Parrinder's comparative methodology excites the curiosity, appreciation and wonder of his readers, even if some who enter into his process of encountering world religions would wish to refine and supplement it with other modes of engagement and understanding.

4. Parrinder and the Primal Religions of Africa

When Geoffrey Parrinder first went to Africa, the religions of that continent were ignored by many scholars of Religious Studies. Although he did not name it, he had E.O. James' book Comparative Religion (1938) particularly in mind when he later wrote that modern books refer to 'the Andamanese, the Arunta and the Aztecs, but not to the Ashanti or to Africa at all' (Parrinder, 1954:20), where primal religion was followed by far more important and larger numbers of people.[116]

Other intellectuals were not only ignorant of African traditional faith but frankly contemptuous of it. Edwin Smith, one of the few serious and sympathetic scholars of African primal faith, described his meeting on 4 January 1930[117] with the biographer, Emil Ludwig, who asked him 'How can the untutored African conceive God?' Ludwig could not

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[116]In a letter dated 13/10/90, Parrinder wrote: 'Although I did not name it, his [James'] "Comparative Religion" was one book I referred to on "African Traditional Religion", as mentioning Aztecs, Arunta and Andanamese, but not Ashanti or even Africa at all'. He also commented, 'I think James never went beyond Europe though he read enormously''. Parrinder believes that personal experience matters, in order to discover connections between the world's living faiths.

[117]For this and for much other information about Smith, I am indebted to letters from and two unpublished articles by W. John Young: '"For Services to Africa": The Contribution of Edwin W. Smith to African Studies'; and 'The Contribution of Edwin Smith to the Study of African Traditional Religion'.

believe Smith when he told him that Africans knew of God as a living power:

> He was frankly incredulous. 'How can this be?' he said. 'Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing.' I doubt whether I convinced him. (Smith, 1950:1; cf.Parrinder, 1954:9)

Geoffrey Parrinder's contribution to the scholarship of African traditional faith, building upon the work of Smith and a few other scholars a generation older than himself, has been to put it that continent's primal religion on the map of Religious Studies as a recognisable and respectable religion. Peter Mackenzie sees Parrinder's:

> achievement as going a long way towards correcting the tendency to see the subject [of the history of religions] largely in terms of Asia and Europe, East and West, by adding the African continent and so the remaining North-South quadrants. (in King and Walls, 1980:151)

We shall examine Parrinder's growing interpretation of African primal faith through four of his books: West African Religion (1949); West African Psychology (1951); African Traditional Religion (1954); and African Mythology (1967). These books illustrate Parrinder's developing thought on the subject or, in the case of the last, express with particular clarity important views which are found elsewhere in his writings.

Parrinder has given African scholars of their ancestral faith a framework within which they have discussed its meaning and continuing relevance; yet most have ignored, or played down this fact. We shall describe this, with

particular reference to the works of the Kenyan, John Mbiti, and the Nigerian, Bolaji Idowu (d.1993).

Finally, we shall discuss Parrinder's achievements in the light of present-day studies of African primal faiths. In particular, we shall assess how far his interpretation has remained a compelling one.

4.1 His developing interpretation.

Parrinder's first book was West African Religion, which Andrew Walls has described as:

> in many respects a very innovative book... in that it treated several African peoples comparatively, and... in terms of their religion. The religion of African peoples, that is, was to be studied in the same way and by the same methods, as the phenomena curiously entitled 'world religions'. (in King and Walls, 1980: 144f)

West African Religion contributed two major themes to Parrinder's developing interpretation of sub-Saharan African religion. First, it defended primal faith against misrepresentations of it by many westerners. Secondly, it proposed a fourfold classification by which it can be understood.

When Parrinder first went to West Africa, two groups of western people actively depreciated primal faith there: some missionaries and, especially, anthropologists. Chapter 2 of West African Religion severely criticises the works of distinguished anthropologists, especially Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) for creating and reinforcing the notion of a

universal 'primitive religion'. They treated African tribes together with Australian aboriginal groups although, in Parrinder's view, many of the former had progressed far beyond the totemistic conceptions of the latter (Parrinder, 1949:11f.). Parrinder also had stern things to say about the word 'fetishism' as an adequate description of West African religion. This word was introduced by the Portuguese, who called the African charms and cult objects *feitiço*, meaning 'magical', and was popularised and made respectable by Auguste Comte, the French philosopher (1798-1857). Parrinder deplored the fact that it lingered 'in the mind as a handy, but undefined and therefore practically useless, description of queer practices in Africa... (and) still appears in some books on religion and anthropology... (and) is still commonly employed by too many missionaries' (Parrinder, 1949:12ff.). Words like fetishism, juju and gree-gree 'need to be relegated to the museum of the writings of early explorers' (Parrinder, 1949:14).

Parrinder had kinder things to write about Edward Burnett Tylor's (1832-1917) introduction of the word animism as 'a good step forward from "fetishism"', because it acknowledges a spiritualistic rather than materialistic view of the world which lies beyond objects of reverence (Parrinder, 1949:14). Nevertheless, he preferred to call the religion of the tribes he describes, polytheism.

In West African Religion, Parrinder proposed a fourfold classification of West African religion to describe his

polytheistic interpretation: a supreme God, chief divinities, 'the cult of the human but divinized ancestors of the clan', and charms and amulets (Parrinder, 1949:16f.). Parrinder regarded this categorisation as 'a working classification' (Parrinder, 1949:17).

Earlier classifications had been made. In 1920, Edwin Smith, in his The Ila-Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia,[116] (now Zambia) had outlined Ila religion under the headings of Dynamism, Souls, the Divinities and the Supreme Being (called Leza by the Ila peoples)[117]. But his classification was only for one family of African people. In 1926, P.A. Talbot had published in four volumes his The Peoples of Southern Nigeria, collating the beliefs of Yoruba, Edo, Ibo, Ijaw and Bantu tribes; except for some details about the Yoruba, he claimed that his information was personally obtained (Parrinder, 1949:3fn2). Not only did Talbot espouse the comparative method, as Parrinder was to do, but he also offered a list of four elements by which to understand the inhabitants of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria: polytheism, anthropomorphism, animism and ancestor worship (Talbot, 1926 vol.2:14). Parrinder thought that 'these books give an excellent survey, although some of the references to the Yoruba are from out-of-date writers' (Parrinder, 1949:3). Since that is precisely where Talbot

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[116]Although this was co-authored by Andrew Dale, internal evidence makes it clear that Smith was responsible for about 90% of the material.

[117]This classification is found in Volume 2, Part 4, Chapters XX to XXIII.

relied on others, perhaps Parrinder was intimating that there is no substitute for personal research.

No doubt Parrinder was influenced by Talbot's classification, but the differences between it and his own are striking. Parrinder tightened up Talbot's model by specifying the kind of polytheism prevalent in West Africa: a widespread notion of a supreme God with many lesser divinities. His last two categories have a more positive connotation than Talbot's last three, avoiding terms which reflected European prejudices about primal religion being a humanistic rather than a genuinely spiritual creed. Indeed, in Parrinder's description of the fourth part of his classification, he noted disapprovingly that charms and amulets are 'called by some, fetishes' (Parrinder, 1949:17).

The most important part of Parrinder's classification, in terms of its influence upon later African scholars of their ancestral faith, was the first: belief in a supreme God. From where did he get this notion?

In his much later encyclopedia, Man and His Gods (1971), he noted that:

> In opposition to psychological or sociological theories of religious origins, some writers have put forward the claim that the earliest religious belief was in one supreme being. Andrew Lang in *The Making of Religion* in 1898, and Wilhelm Schmidt in *The Origins of the Idea of God* [1912; revised edition 1926], were two leading exponents of this view. (Parrinder, 1971a:14)

Parrinder has nevertheless denied that Schmidt had any profound influence upon his location of a Supreme God in most of West African traditional religion.[118] However, he had read this book when at Richmond College, and its views must have implicitly provided an intellectual stimulus for and justification of the first part of his fourfold classification of West African belief.

A book that was more important in helping Parrinder explain the existence of the belief in a Supreme Being was Captain R.S. Rattray's Ashanti (1923), which was written about that people of the Gold Coast (now Ghana). Parrinder inherited the book from Ernest Taylor[119] and read it in 1943. He was particularly impressed by its depiction of the High God. He believed that:

> R.S. Rattray has shown conclusively that not only is a supreme God believed in throughout Ashanti, but that there are multitudinous small altars to him, as well as some dedicated priests and temples. (Parrinder, 1949:20; cf.Rattray, 1923:139-144)

Parrinder's apprehension of a supreme God among black Africans was also confirmed by Diedrich Westermann, Professor of African Languages at Berlin University, and Director of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, a centre established by European missionaries and also administrators and academics concerned with Africa. Parrinder's chapter on 'The Supreme

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[118]Interview with Parrinder on 1/11/94.

[119]See Chapter 1.2.

God' in the first edition of West African Religion (1949) ends with a quotation from Westermann's book, Africa and Christianity (1937):

> The African's God is a *deus incertus* and a *deus remotus*: there is always an atmosphere of indefiniteness about him... He is the God of the thoughtful, not of the crowd... it is in the sayings of these people that sometimes the figure of God assumes features of a truly personal and purely divine Supreme Being. (Quoted in Parrinder, 1949:32; cf.Westermann, 1937:74f.)

In that chapter, Parrinder pointed out that a supreme God is often a remote figure in West Africa, and although he is acknowledged, very often no cult is offered to him, especially among the Yoruba. However, in the revised edition of West African Religion (1961), Parrinder conceded that 'I have come to think that God is closer to ordinary people than this [passage from Westermann's book] suggests, and certainly that he is not a creation of lonely philosophers but has been believed in from time immemorial' (Parrinder, 1961a:25).

Unlike West African Religion, Parrinder's book West African Psychology (1951) is a synthetic work, appropriating and popularising other peoples' scholarship rather than offering any original research. It was written whilst he was in Guernsey (1946-49).

This book is particularly significant for introducing the work of Edwin Smith and Placide Tempels. In his foreword to West African Religion, Smith had referred to 'Dynamism'. He observed:

> Every religion has its higher and lower strata - our popular Christianity is no exception. So in West Africa there is what I call Dynamism - the belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in, impersonal, pervasive, mysterious forces acting through charms and amulets, words, spells, divinations. This sort of thing is universal and we ourselves have not completely grown out of it - witness our mascots and superstitions about 'luck'. (Parrinder, 1949:xi)

In West African Religion, Parrinder had not referred to 'Dynamism', though it has resonances with the fourth part of his classification of primal belief, 'charms and amulets'. In West African Psychology, he referred to 'Dynamism' on a number of occasions, but preferred the concept of *force vitale*, popularised by Father Tempels in his book La Philosophie Bantoue about his work in the Belgian Congo (now Zaïre). Parrinder believed that both 'Dynamism' and *force vitale* were descriptions of 'the widespread African belief in psychic power' (Parrinder, 1954:21), and that both concepts were 'much akin' to each other (Parrinder, 1951a:10), Smith, however, took issue with aspects of Tempels' theory whilst agreeing that 'it is on the right lines' (Smith 1950:17-23).

It was Tempels' book which was crucial to Parrinder's growing interest in the thought-world of Africans, and their belief in psychic powers. Parrinder described it as 'a very important little book, whose value is out of all proportion to its size'.[120] He went to some trouble to get

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[120]Tempels' text takes up pages 13-123 of the English translation which I have used. It was first published from (then) Elizabethville, Belgian Congo, in 1945.

hold of a copy, acknowledging a debt to the Belgian Colonial Secretary in London, who presented him with a copy at a time when it was difficult, in the post-war years of austerity, to obtain it through normal channels (Parrinder, 1951a:2 and fn2).

It was precisely the concept of *force vitale* which aroused Parrinder's enthusiasm. According to Tempels:

> [Bantu behaviour] is centred on a single value: vital force... The Bantu say, in respect of a number of strange practices in which we [Europeans] see neither rime nor reason, that their purpose is to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly, that they are to make life stronger, or to assure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity. (Tempels, 1959:30)

Parrinder remarked of 'vital force':

> it is so true, not only of the Bantu, but perhaps of most parts of Africa, that those who are acquainted with African ways, beliefs, and forms of speech, cannot but be struck both by the aptness of the expression and by long-familiar words and ideas which it brings into relief. (Parrinder, 1951a:8)

He offered as an illustration:

> Force, power, energy, vitality, life, dynamism, these are the operative notions behind prayers to God, invocations of divinities, offerings to ancestors, everything that may be termed religion, including therein what we [Europeans] are pleased to designate "magic" or "medicine". The aim of all these practices being to strengthen and to affirm life. (Parrinder, 1951a:8)

Parrinder's enthusiasm for the widespread validity of Tempels' thesis was considerable. He contended that in many African languages there are words or phrases indicating a

more than merely physical force. This was found, he averred, in the language of French-speaking African groups he had encountered. As an example, he referred to a phrase he had often heard in Ivory Coast:'"tu as gagné la force" or "il a gagné la force"' (Parrinder, 1951a:9). Parrinder deduced from the concept of *force vitale* the fact that African philosophy assumes that there is life, or dynamic force in all things. This contrasts with the European philosophy of an inanimate universe, and also with Hindu and older European pantheistic views of the universe as animated by a 'world-force' (Parrinder, 1951a:10). Rather:

> the African recognises individuality, a hierarchy, good and evil, life and death. There are different forces, and diversity of beings. They accept individuality, as we [Europeans] do, always with the understanding that an individual "force" is meant. (Parrinder, 1951a:10)

Parrinder also accepted and extended to other Africans Tempels' thesis that there is in Bantu philosophy a hierarchy of powers, so that the higher exert considerable influence on those below them. Animals and plants and even minerals have spiritual forces associated with them, but lower in grade than those of human beings, among whom the divinised ancestors and then the living chiefs take precedence (Parrinder, 1951a:156f.; and Tempels, 1959:41ff). In West African Psychology, however, he did not make anything of Tempels' conviction that, in African belief, above all force is God, who alone has force in himself and gives existence to other forces (Tempels, 1959:41) This seems to be because the focus of Parrinder's

book is more psychological than theological, more about the human mind than the nature and status of God.

'Vital force' supplied Parrinder with a way of asserting that West African religion has a *sui generis* spirituality which Europeans need to understand and respect: West Africans relate to the world as a living and hierarchical reality of 'forces' or 'powers' with which their lives are inextricably linked. Moreover, the insights of Tempels and Smith, working in other parts of Africa but producing theories which he Parrinder believed could be applied to the peoples he had studied in West Africa, strengthened his commitment to a growing recognition that there are certain common features in all sub-Saharan African primal religious systems.

Between the writing of West African Psychology and African Traditional Religion (published in 1954), Parrinder had moved to Ibadan. In the preface to the revised 1961 edition of West African Religion, he wrote:

> the readers I had originally in mind were mainly European students of comparative religion, and prospective missionaries and Government officials. Some of these have read it, but even more it has been used in West Africa, both by African students of religion and by general readers... I owe a great debt to my [African] students [in Ibadan]. We learnt many things together, and I want to thank them for their forbearance, and also to express the hope that they learnt something of the value of... the proper place of their ancestral religion in the context of the world's religions. (Parrinder, 1961a:vii)

What was that 'proper place' for African primal faith? According to Parrinder, it was as one of 'Africa's Three

Religions', a world faith alongside Christianity and Islam.[121] By 1952, he wrote of 'the belief in a Supreme Being, an idea widespread in Africa, as can be seen from the book, *African Ideas of God*' (Parrinder, 1952a:1139). For by then, he had extended his conviction that belief in a High God was common throughout West Africa, to cover all of black Africa. The book to which he referred was a symposium edited by Edwin Smith,[122] and published in 1950. Parrinder contributed a chapter on 'Theistic Beliefs of the Yoruba and Ewe Peoples of West Africa' (pp.224-240) in which he argued that they were polytheists with a belief in a Supreme Being. This symposium covered a wide range of peoples south of the Sahara, including groups from South Africa, Sierra Leone, Northern Nyasaland (now Malawi) and Uganda. All the contributors were white Christians, most were clergymen, and each detected a belief of some sort in a Supreme God among the people whom he or she describes.

In African Traditional Religion (1954) Parrinder extended the insights of that symposium and of his own previous works on West African primal religion to cover all of sub-Saharan Africa. He argued for the existence of a phenomenon for which he coined the term, "African Traditional Religion".

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[121]Although Africa's Three Religions was the title of a book not published until 1976 (it was a reprint of a work first published in 1969 as Religion in Africa), Parrinder's description of a sub-Saharan 'African Traditional Religion' was in place by 1954, as we describe in the text.

[122]After Smith's death, Parrinder was editor of its second edition (1961).

In the opening chapter of the book, Parrinder dealt with the question of 'how can one speak at all usefully of African Religion?' (Parrinder, 1954:10). His answer was twofold. He argued that 'the apparent homogeneity of other religions is much less real than apparent'(Parrinder, 1954:10): the major religions of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam contain within themselves vast differences of belief and practice. Furthermore, he quoted from an article in *The Listener* (21/8/52) by Dr Hilda Kuper, 'a great authority on South Africa' to persuade his readers that by comparison with developed industrial societies, 'African tribal societies are relatively undifferentiated and homogenous'. He then extended that argument, claiming that 'this great comparative homogeneity of African society is apparent in the religious sphere' (Parrinder, 1954:11).

The second chapter of <u>African Traditional Religion</u> is entitled 'A Spiritual Universe'. In it, Parrinder extended what Smith called 'Dynamism' and Tempels *force vitale* to cover all of black Africa. By now, Parrinder was convinced by the view, which Tempels had stressed, that 'above all [powers] is the Supreme Being' (Parrinder, 1954:24). He described the African perspective of the spiritual universe as:

> represented by a triangle. At the apex is the sky, which symbolizes the Supreme Power from which all life flows and to which all returns. The base is the earth, sometimes personified as a goddess, but always important to man as the producer of his food and the burying-place of his dead. On the earth lives man, and his chiefs and kings are rungs in the ladder between

> himself and God.[123] On one side of the triangle are the ancestors, rising up in the hierarchy by their increased powers. Dead kings and chiefs are their leaders and potent to help or harm. On the other side of the triangle are the gods, or natural forces, which must be propitiated lest they become angry at neglect and cause the seasons to fail. (Parrinder, 1954:25)

After the book's two introductory chapters, there are three sections dealing with: the pantheons; the social group; and, spiritual forces. When we look at these sections, and the chapters within them, we can see that Parrinder's fourfold classification of West African religion has become applied to all of sub-Saharan African faith. So in the first section, there are chapters on 'The Supreme Being' and 'Nature Gods'; in the second, chapters on 'The Ancestors', 'Divine Rulers', 'Communal Ritual', 'Personal Ritual' and 'Sacred Specialists; and the final section deals with 'Magic and Sorcery', 'Witchcraft' and 'The Soul and its Destiny'.

In its confident application of West African primal religious beliefs to the whole of black Africa, African Traditional Religion was the *magnum opus* of Parrinder's African years, in importance though not in length[124].

Unlike the great world religions which have their scriptures, African primal faith does not; writing came late to the continent. Because, in the minds of many,

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[123]Parrinder's use of the higher case for God, employed rather than the designation 'Supreme Being', also serves to dignify African primal faith in his readers' minds.

[124]Parrinder's text runs from pages 9 to 147 of what is almost a pocket-size book.

writing is a bearer of culture and the intellect, African civilization has been depreciated by them. Parrinder recognised this fact. He wrote that:

> This reader may have some knowledge of the religions of other continents, especially Asia, and know that Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are great faiths, with a long history, considerable literature, and innumerable temples and priests. But what is there comparable in Africa..? (Parrinder, 1954:9)

Parrinder could point to a long history and to temples and priests.[125] The problem was the 'considerable literature'; indeed, there were no texts at all. Because primal faith has no scriptures comparable to the Semitic, Indian and Chinese traditions of faith, Emil Ludwig's words ('How can the untutored African conceive God?') could seem to ring true.

In African Mythology (1967, revised 1982) Parrinder accepted that there are no written sacred scriptures in Africa, but argued instead that:

> Africans themselves recorded their thoughts, their beliefs, and their feelings... in the many and various forms of African art... Since African art was the only 'writing' known in the whole of tropical Africa it was used to interpret life in every aspect. (Parrinder, 1982:8)

His most thorough treatment of this phenomenon is in his article, 'Religions of Illiterate People', written for a

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[125]'The fact that there are no written texts does not mean that African religions have not a long history... As for the innumerable temples and priests of other lands, they can well be paralleled in Africa' (Parrinder, 1954:18f.).

book of essays, Myths and Symbols (1971), in honour of Mircea Eliade. In it, he denied that the absence of literature meant that such religions, not only in Africa but elsewhere, were 'primitive' in the sense that they have no complex culture or give useful information about the origins of religion. In his view, 'the description "primitive" is misleading and should be abandoned' (Parrinder, 1971c:550f.). He explained that:

> the art of writing is a rare and comparatively recent human acquisition... Lack of writing may be due not to primitiveness but to cultural isolation... [as happened to] Africans isolated by the Sahara desert and tropical forests. (Parrinder, 1971c:550)

Parrinder was frank about the problems of uncovering the heritage of the religions of illiterate people:

> Absence of religious literature meant that not only are there no written texts which transmit the thoughts of one generation to another, but there is no history of the religion and its development. It need not be doubted that there have been outstanding thinkers, priests, prophets, and poets, in Africa, America, and Australia. But they have disappeared with scarcely a trace, wasting their sweetness on the desert air. If they effected any changes in the direction of religious development, little or nothing is known of them... There is nothing from the inside, to tell us what it is like to belong to an illiterate religion. Reliance must be placed almost entirely on outside observation. (Parrinder, 1971c:552)

That is where art and, to some extent, architecture come in, to give 'religious expression in tangible and lasting form' (Parrinder, 1971c:552).

Parrinder's article 'Religions of Illiterate People' is contained in an academic book, whereas African Mythology is

a 'coffee-table' book with remarkable and suggestive photographs of African art and architecture. It served to popularise his conviction that 'African art provides a sacred literature' (Parrinder, 1982:8). In it, he contended that another source than art giving information about the essential nature of African ancestral religion is myth, stories passed down from generation to generation, collected first by Europeans and Americans who wrote down what Africans told them, and later by educated Africans (Parrinder, 1982:8). From these stories, one can deduce African peoples' beliefs about the Supreme God, the Spirits, the ancestors and so on. Parrinder recounted many etiological stories about animals, describing, for example, how the leopard got its spots (Parrinder, 1982:124ff.).[126] The photographs of African art often illustrate and interpret the mythology. Meditation upon them helps outsiders to feel something of the attraction of primal faith for its adherents, and to assess it as a powerful, original and important religion of humankind.

4.2 His pivotal contribution.

Parrinder's major contribution to the study of African primal faith has been to establish and popularise the notion of it as a world religion, deserving of respect and study. Parrinder is the seminal scholar who has focused, sifted and articulated the work of previous western

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[126]Parrinder emphasises the vital role God plays in African mythology in his article, 'God in African Mythology' in Parrinder, 1969b:111-125.

scholars and given to Africans a model in which they could formulate and elaborate their own concerns.

However, in its details, Parrinder's has not been an original contribution to the study of African primal faith. This is illustrated by an examination of the origins of his fourfold classification of West African belief. Writing of it, Andrew Walls observed that it is:

> now all but axiomatic, and one finds it right across the plethora of works that now exist on African religions, including those which affect a rather high and mighty tone when talking of books as old as *West African Religion*. One is therefore led to assume that it has always been axiomatic - until one tries to trace it before Parrinder. (in King and Walls, 1980:145)

This is overstated. We have noted that Talbot had formulated an earlier categorisation across a range of tribes. Moreover, since Parrinder's attempt, others have been offered (including Bolaji Idowu's and John Mbiti's, which we shall examine later).

A generation earlier, Edwin Smith had come very close to offering a model. In his book The Secret of the African 1929), he treated Africans as, to some extent, a homogenous group. (Indeed, even earlier he had written of pan-African traditional religious beliefs.[127]) The book's first chapter

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[127]For example, as early as 1907, Smith had written that it was wrong 'to lump all the African's ideas together as mere "superstition". One cannot regard with other than sympathy their seeking for the light, and if, in their gropings in the dark, they have, as we must recognise, developed many beliefs harmful and repulsive, yet we must also recognise that they have laid hold of some essential truths'. (Smith, 1907:19)

is called 'The Basis of African Religion', and, of Parrinder's fourfold classification, the sense of a supreme God throughout black Africa as assumed in this work.[128] Also, Smith's view of 'Dynamism' is set out in the book which focuses on the same features as are included in the fourth part of Parrinder's model. Moreover, what Malcom McVeigh calls Smith's dynamism-spiritism-theism triangle is apparent in The Secret of the African, though more fully worked out in African Beliefs and Christian Faith, which was published in 1936 (McVeigh, 1974:181). We have noted that Parrinder, in his African Traditional Religion, also produced a triangle, though with a slightly different emphasis than Smith's. So, whilst it is true that Parrinder's model was his own, aspects of it had been foreshadowed, not least in the works of Edwin Smith.

Andrew Walls has also written that:

> if West African Religion was an innovative book, it is hardly too much to call African Traditional Religion... a normative one. It is deceptive in its size and apparent simplicity... What Parrinder did was to draw out the implications of the Smith Symposium [African Ideas of God (1950)]. Sub-Saharan Africa provided a coherent body of beliefs, which while changing, could be studied together as a corpus of belief and practice alongside the so-called 'great religions'. (in King and Walls, 1980:147)

This is a fair appraisal, yet it implies that, even earlier than Parrinder, Smith had believed in the notion of a Supreme God throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Parrinder was

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[128]There are seven chapters in the book, three of which discuss 'The African's Awareness of God' in different areas: South Africa, Central Africa and West Africa.

not the first scholar to identify certain common beliefs throughout Africa South of the Sahara desert.

Nor was Parrinder the first scholar to attack descriptions of primal faith as animistic, or by other depreciatory terms. For example, Rattray's Ashanti had criticised the depiction of Ashanti religion as fetishism (Smith, 1929b:113ff.). Rattray had written that:

> These beliefs have for centuries been described as 'fetishism' or 'fetish worship', but the religious conceptions of the Twi-speaking peoples of the Gold Coast and of Ashanti have, in my opinion, been grievously misrepresented. (Rattray, 1923:86)

Since Parrinder was dependent on other scholars of African primal faith for aspects of his growing interpretation of African Traditional Religion, what then have been his specific achievements?

He had experienced a different religious and cultural expression of faith, and recorded it sympathetically and objectively. The African worldview of ghosts, spirits and divinised ancestors provided Parrinder with a dimension of human experience which had virtually lapsed in the West. Although he condemned some aspects of it, especially witchcraft,[129] his has by no means been a blanket denunciation. His book African mythology (1967) recounts stories of 'the Origin of Death' and of 'The World Beyond' (Parrinder, 1967:56-68). In his foreword to Amos Tutuola's novel My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (1954), Parrinder wrote

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[129]See Chapter 5.3.

that 'there are themes running through the book, as to the nature of death, fear and disease' (Tutuola, 1954:13). Many years later, he was to write an article on 'ghosts'. In it, he noted that in Africa, ghosts were usually dead people, walking abroad for some reason (Parrinder, 1979a:242f.) Parrinder's most interesting work on human nature as transcending death has been done on Indian and specifically Hindu religion. In The Indestructible Soul (1973), ten chapters deal with such issues as: sleep and death; transmigration and rebirth; heaven and hell, ghosts and spirits; and nirvana and beatitude. Yet his interest in many of these themes began in Africa, where he observed a different attitude towards the indestructible soul than that of his Christian faith, particularly in its western cultural garb.[130]

He has written positively about the value of African faith. Although some of his predecessors had written empathetically of African faith with hardly any dismissive value-judgements, for example Rattray[131], they did not command the wide audience that Parrinder was to attract. Actually, most earlier scholars used terminology which nowadays seems unacceptable, even when they made appreciative statements about Africans and their faith.

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[130]Chapter 7:*passim* argues that he has been more successful in interpreting these phenomena objectively as they occur in Africa than in India.

[131]He had written, rather movingly, that: 'I approached these old people and this difficult subject (their religious beliefs) in the spirit of one who came to them as a seeker after truth...'. (Rattray, 1923:11)

One example is Edwin Smith, who believed that in some measure African primal faith mediated God to people. Indeed, he expected to be greeted in heaven by his non-Christian friend Mungalo: 'Heaven itself will be something less than heaven if I do not hear that greeting - *Mulongwangu*! [my friend] - when I enter the pearly gates' (Smith, 1926b:325). Yet even he referred to 'savage people' in The Ila Speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia (Smith and Dale, 1920 vol 1:66). And, in paying tribute to his co-author in the preface to that work (Dale died in 1919), Smith wrote, 'Happy Britain to have such sons as he to represent her among the backward races!' (Smith and Dale, 1920 vol 1:xv).[132]

Parrinder rarely made depreciatory statements, and then only at the beginning of his career. The most notable example was when, referring to his fourfold classification of West African belief in his earliest book, he maintained that:

> distinctions should not be made too rigidly. Europeans like to impose logical order, which may sometimes be foreign to the subject; but as Africans appear often incapable of working out an ordered system, it is all the more important to seize upon the broad differences that do exist. (Parrinder, 1949:17)

In the 1961 revised edition of his book, the clause about distinctions is retained but the uncharacteristically

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[132]W. John Young's unpublished research indicates that Smith's views developed over the years, but 'retained the idea of the school with the Africans in the bottom class': letter dated 26/3/95.

judgemental sentence aboul Africans is omitted (Parrinder, 1961a:12). By and large, the condescending aspect of Smith's liberalism, even if well-intentioned and, in its day, forward looking, is not found in Parrinder. It is hard to envisage him permitting a title like The Secret of the African; still less, The Religion of Lower Races (1923).[133] Moreover, not only did Parrinder abandon depreciatory assessments of traditional faith, but also he persuaded his readers that attempts to discover the origins of religion were unacceptable. In his judgement, this was an impossible task, it almost always made negative judgements upon primal faith as 'primitive', and could lead to depreciatory and even racist comments such as that of Emil Ludwig.

Parrinder wrote an article 'Totem and Taboo: A Revaluation' (Parrinder, 1948:307-312) at the same time as his book West African Psychology. In it he was seriously critical of Freud's theory about the origin of religion. He made certain specific criticisms of Freud's work. For example, he pointed out that totemism is quite unknown in West Africa, where polytheism is widespread (Parrinder, 1948:308). Parrinder would not have appreciated the title of Freud's first essay, 'The savage's dread of incest', though he graciously but pointedly noted that his work

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[133]To be fair, the title of this latter book was forced upon Smith by his publishers, and it did not reflect his thinking. Indeed, twenty years later he refused to sign a copy of it in a New York library: Smith's unpublished diary for June 9th 1943. I owe this reference to W. John Young.

contains 'many invaluable observations, concerning both primitive *and civilized* mentality (Parrinder, 1948:308).[134]

Whilst in Ibadan, a particular notion that Parrinder challenged was that monotheism had diffused southwards from ancient Egypt so that primal faiths retain some, but not many, vestiges of that original monotheism. Parrinder did not believe that primal religion was a degenerate faith, and maintained that the theory certainly could not be proved (Parrinder, 1954:18f., and Parrinder, 1956b:61-67). He may, however, have changed his mind on the matter of Egyptian influences upon primal faith. In the first edition of West African Religion, in recounting the story of the river god Tano's wrestling with death, he commented '(Egyptian influence? Compare Jacob at Penial)', which is deleted from the book's second edition (Parrinder, 1949:56; cf.Parrinder, 1961a:46).

Parrinder came to believe that those who put forward theories of the origin of religion were engaged in a 'dubious adventure' (Parrinder, 1966:257). Indeed:

> the amazing, almost unbelievable, fact about nearly all these theorists on primitive religions and the beginnings of religion, was that they had no experience of the tribes about which they wrote so pontifically. (Parrinder, 1966:260)

In the article from which this quotation comes, 'The Origins of Religion', he paid tribute to E.E. Evans-Pritchard's book, Theories of Primitive Religion (1965)

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[134]The italics are mine.

which he regarded as 'the complete demolition of Victorian theorists [of the origins of religion]' (Parrinder, 1966:257). Actually, Parrinder had been attacking their influence and those of their disciples for many years before this book came out. More than any of his predecessors, he was instrumental in raising the status of African primal religion.[135]

Parrinder was fortunate to teach a course in Nigeria in the years leading up to its independence (which occurred in 1960, four years after his departure). No doubt some of his students took his course on African primal faith in order to understand who they were in relation to their spiritual and cultural heritage. The textbook for that course was West African Religion:

> What else was available for the students of the first university in the world to devise an examination paper in the religious beliefs of West Africa? And so a boook (sic) written for a British audience became much more read by Africans and a European became the teacher of Africans on some aspects of their cultural and religious inheritance that some had learned to despise or be ashamed of. (Walls, in King and Walls, 1980:145f.)

Parrinder's early books were therefore right 'for the time, the 1950s and 1960s, when African political independence shattered the most colonial of continents and African studies were booming in Western societies' (H.W. Turner in

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[135]In more recent times, many scholars have admitted that early generations of anthropologists who tried to define the original form of human society had embarked upon an illusory quest. See, in particular, Adam Kuper, 1988:*passim*, but especially 1-14.

King and Walls, 1980:157). West African Religion was in print in one form or another for forty years. In 1989 Parrinder wrote that:

> Forty years ago my first book on African religion was published, although it had been in preparation long before, and it was followed by demands for similar studies of comparative religion elsewhere in Africa... However, only the other day news came that this book, which has sold tens of thousands of copies, is now out of print. (Parrinder, 1989a:273)

His was the first book to make a comparison over a wide area, in a compass short enough and in a sufficiently accessible style to be suitable for a larger readership than Talbot and Rattray aspired to reach. To be sure, Smith wrote many books, some popular in style. But he did not teach primal faith and use his works as text-books. Parrinder's experience in Benin, Ivory Coast and Nigeria encouraged him to compare,[136] not only in order to contrast but also to see what was held in common. He has been the great populariser of the interpretation of African primal faith as worthy of comparison with other great faith-systems. Turner wrote that:

> Parrinder's contribution has been to give us the first series of area or continent-wide studies, free from grosser western distortions, rooted in accurate data and considerable first-hand experience, and presented in a straightforward and understandable way. Small wonder that they have become the textbooks for several

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[136]Parrinder wrote: 'It is probably more profitable to live for years in a few regions, and gradually to absorb as much as one can of the local ways of thought. Then one is better armed for a study of the larger field'. (Parrinder, 1954:13). He wrote 'region', not 'religion' as Andrew Walls misquotes (in King and Walls, 1980:148), which gives rather a different perspective.

> generations of students. (in King and Walls, 1980:156f.)

Not quite the first of such studies, since the distinction for that achievement dates back at least to Talbot for area studies and, more importantly, to Smith's symposium, African Ideas of God, for a continent-wide study of a particular pan-African belief (more precisely, south of the Sahara). But Parrinder has written more accessibly and been more widely read. Moreover, he has written ambitiously and confidently of a wide range of beliefs and practices in sub-Saharan Africa which can be examined under the umbrella-term of African Traditional Religion.

So although a case could be made that it was Smith who invented the idea of African Traditional Religion, it was Parrinder who coined the term, in his great work of 1954. Years later, in a review of The World's Religions, a 'series of interlinked essays' edited by Stewart Sutherland, Leslie Houlden, Peter Clarke and Friedhelm Hardy, he wrote '"African Traditional Religion" [is] a term I can claim to have introduced in a book of that title in 1954' (Parrinder, 1989b:165).[137] While the details of his interpretation were foreshadowed or can be paralleled elsewhere, his developed interpretation of a black African faith, or more precisely family of faiths, with certain distinctive features, as he developed it through the four

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[137]In a letter dated 3/10/90, Parrinder repeated his avowal that African Traditional Religion was 'a title which I can claim to have invented'.

works is certainly unique. It has been attractive, not least for his African students and readers who can take pride in a religion that can stand comparison with any other as a compelling interpretation of ultimate reality.

4.3 Criticisms of Parrinder's interpretation.

Parrinder's depiction of African Traditional Religion has been a considerable achievement. But is it a credible interpretation of African primal faith(s), or just a captivating invention?

Among those who have accepted Parrinder's model as representing reality are African scholars whom Rosalind Shaw describes as shaping African indigenous religions upon 'Judeo-Christian templates' (in King, 1990:182f.) They have criticised aspects of Parrinder's work but are deeply indebted to his framework of African Traditional Religion. The two most important examples are Mbiti and Idowu. In her article 'The Invention of "African Traditional Religion"', Shaw argues that, despite different nuances in their works 'Parrinder, Idowu and Mbiti... created an authorized version of African religions as '"African Traditional Religion" which is still strongly hegemonic' (in Hackett, 1990:345).

Can Idowu and Mbiti be meaningfully bracketed with Parrinder? All offer classifications of primal faith. Parrinder's was the first and although Idowu and Mbiti

develop his in different ways, their categorisations are clearly dependent on it. Idowu argued that:

> taking Africa as a whole, there are in reality five component beliefs that go into the making of African traditional religion. These are belief in God, belief in the divinities, belief in spirits, belief in ancestors, and the practice of magic and medicine, each with its own consequent attendant cult. (Idowu, 1973:139)

Mbiti offered a fivefold 'key' to unlock the meaning of primal faith:

1. *God* as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things
2. *Spirits* being made up of superhuman beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago
3. *Man* including human beings who are alive and those about to be born
4. *Animals and plants*, or the remainder of biological life
5. *Phenomena and objects without biological life.* (Mbiti, 1969:16)

In his African Religions and Philosophy (1969), Mbiti rarely mentioned Parrinder's work, except when he dealt with the subjects of mediums and diviners (Mbiti, 1969:171-178), though he did describe African Traditional Religion as 'the pioneer work [on the subject of African primal faiths]' (Mbiti, 1969:12).

The most important concept in primal faith for both Idowu and Mbiti is God. Mbiti takes his emphasis on the importance of God in African primal faith to remarkable lengths. In a chapter on the 'The Worship of God' in African Religions and Philosophy, he wrote that:

> in some cases, sacrifices and offerings are directed to one or more of the following: God, spirits, and living dead. Recipients in the second and third categories are regarded as intermediaries between God and men, so that *God is the ultimate Recipient whether or not the worshippers are aware of that.*[138] (Mbiti, 1969:58)

That Mbiti's chief concern has been a Christian theological one, to show that belief in God is a central concern of African ancestral religion as well as of Christianity, can be most clearly seen in his book, Concepts of God in Africa (1970). This is a collection about the High God drawn from more than 270 African peoples, collected in four parts: the nature of God; active attributes of God; anthropomorphic and natural attributes of God; and, God and man. His material is ahistorical and decontextualised, and subordinated to Christian theological concerns and language. This is surely the *reductio ad absurdum* of African primal faith to Christian categories. Certainly, Mbiti does not stand confessionally within ancestral religion, affirming that:

> I consider traditional religions, Islam, and the other religious systems to be preparatory and even essential ground in the search for the Ultimate. But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that ultimate Identity, Foundation, and Source of security [Jesus Christ]. (Mbiti, 1969:277)

This is the language of devotion. It does not describe in an objective way the phenomena Mbiti has observed or studied.

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[138]The italics are mine.

Indeed, Mbiti's confident statement about the preparatory role of Islam distorts Islam's self-definition as the final religion revealed through the 'seal of the prophets' (Quran 33:40); nor has it been matched by any detailed knowledge or insight about it. For example, in his African Religion and Philosophy, he writes that 'On the purely religious front, it has done little to add to or alter radically African religiosity, except in the (in any case external) ritual side...' (Mbiti, 1969:253). This is simply inaccurate. Islam has had an important effect on the social side of African life. For example, in permitting polygyny, it has encouraged many erstwhile devotees of primal faith to prefer it to Christianity. Moreover, Mbiti's comment misses the point about the importance in Islam of religious law, governing rituals and other aspects of life.[139]

Idowu was similarly committed to the Christian faith. In his book Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief (1962), he confessed that 'of all the forces at work [in Yorubaland; Western Nigeria], Christianity, by its unique and universal message, stands the best chance of fulfilling that which is implied in the Yoruba concept of God' (Idowu, 1962:214). As with Mbiti, this is the rhetoric of faith, removed from actuality: Islam has many followers among the Yorubas.

What is the traditional Yoruba belief, according to Idowu? In Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief, he put forward the

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[139]See further, Trimingham, 1962:*passim*.

notion of a religion 'Olodumareism' and a term 'diffused monotheism', to denote the fact that Yoruba religion is monotheistic, in which Olodumare delegates certain parts of his authority to divine functionaries who obey his commands (Idowu, 1962:204).[140] This description of a monotheistic faith differs from Parrinder's judgement that African primal faith is polytheistic with a widespread belief in a supreme being.

Parrinder had helped Idowu with his work, which was for a London Ph.D, and later examined it for him in London.[141] Characteristically, he was willing to learn from his student. Idowu had noted that:

> Parrinder, writing as recently as 1949 [in West African Religion], said: 'The Yoruba call God Olorun. No cult is attached to him...'; and he went on to describe him as this 'supreme but unworshipped God'. (Idowu, 1962:140; cf. Parrinder, 1949:26)

The second edition of Parrinder's book reflected change in the wake of Idowu's research:

> recently Dr Idowu has argued persuasively that the older name for God is the title Olodumare, still widely used, and rather mysterious in meaning, perhaps 'almighty' or 'omnipotent ruler'. He... suggests that the popularity of the name Olorun ['owner of the sky'] grew with Christian and Muslim influence because of its clear and monotheistic sense. (Parrinder, 1961a:19f.)

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[140]In constructing this, he built upon Wilhelm Schmidt's notion of 'primitive monotheism' (cf. Schmidt, 1931:*passim*), and E.E Evans-Pritchard's evaluation of the Nuer God Kwoth as 'refracted' into other divinities and spirits (Evans-Pritchard, 1956:110-115).

[141]In a letter dated 28/6/91.

At first, Idowu showed a similar generosity. He recorded in the preface to his book that:

> it is based on a thesis presented to the University of London in 1955 for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Theology. In this connection, I record my deep gratitude to Rev. Dr Geoffrey Parrinder, who inspired and supervised my thesis throughout. (Idowu, 1962:viii)

Such gratitude did not survive in Idowu's African Traditional Religion (1973), a book in which he extended his definition of 'diffused monotheism' to cover all of black Africa, rather as Parrinder had extended his fourfold classification of West African belief to sub-Saharan Africa. The influence of the older scholar upon the younger is obvious. Yet it was unacknowledged by Idowu.

Indeed, it is extraordinary that Idowu should have used the title of Parrinder's most important work on African religion. Parrinder recalls that:

> He took my title of African Traditional Religion, without any acknowledgement. SCM sent me the MS to read, and I pointed out to them that I had already used it and my book with this title was in print. But they went ahead and used it still - not a good publishing practice I think.[142]

Since the basic thesis of Idowu's work, that there exists a recognisable black African religion, is the same as Parrinder's almost two decades before, it is hard to resist the conclusion that, despite differences of emphasis between them, Idowu was taking credit for his former

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[142]A letter dated 28/6/91 .

teacher's hard work. Indeed, some years earlier he had also covered ground already trodden by Parrinder; Idowu wrote a chapter on 'Traditional Religion and Christianity' in a book entitled The City of Ibadan (1967).[143] He added little or nothing of importance to what Parrinder had recorded; Rosalind Hackett has described it as 'far from being an exhaustive survey with little factual data and background on the institutions mentioned' (Hackett, 1989:7).

On one occasion in his African Traditional Religion, Idowu implied that Parrinder is a so-called expert from the West who has not really understood his subject matter:

> African students have... hitherto entered upon their studies with an academic temper dictated by the attitudes and terminologies of foreign writers. This happens not only with students but also with lecturers and professors who have been captured by Westernism and have not yet been able to find a way out of its spiritual and intellectual bondage. Such can only discuss African Traditional Religion by quoting from books. A case in point was that of an African Professor who made a questionable statement about the religion. After his attention had been called to his error, he remarked at an open lecture: 'I consulted Parrinder's book [which one is unspecified, as is the alleged error] and discovered that Africans considered it offensive to use such a term...'! (Idowu, 1973:204)

This is ironic, since Idowu was deeply indebted to Parrinder, a western scholar, for his own interpretation, which has been (as we shall see) much less nuanced and written from a far more explicitly Christian perspective than his teacher's. Moreover, from this story Idowu drew

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[143]Lloyd, P.C., Mabogunje, A.L. and Awe, B. (ed) (1967), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press with the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

the deduction that 'it appears at first sight that [for those who read Parrinder] the religion as *religion* is no longer a matter of ultimate concern' (Idowu, 1973:204). Yet a major concern of Parrinder is precisely that African religion should be appreciated and not maligned.

Why should Idowu have shown such discourtesy towards Parrinder, some of it uninformed or else deliberately misleading? One plausible answer is to count him among 'theological cultural nationalists'[144] who, towards the end of and after imperial rule, forged their identity over against western scholars and who, in the context of the times, understandably attacked them even when they were indebted to them. Yet Idowu has been a maverick figure in recent Nigerian history, and it seems simpler and truer to interpret him as less a scholar of integrity than a man determined upon the pursuit of personal fame even at the expense of 'cutting corners', not only in the world of scholarship but also in that of ecclesiastical politics.[145]

Neither Mbiti's nor Idowu's interpretations of primal African faith have been particularly nuanced. Mbiti argued

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[144]I am indebted to Rosalind Shaw for this depiction; see her article in King, 1990:185.

[145] Idowu was a great deal responsible for the breakdown at the eleventh hour of ecumenical church discussions in Nigeria between Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians in 1965. In 1975, he became 'Patriarch for life' of Nigerian Methodism with the title 'His Pre-Eminence', and with two golden keys given to him as a symbol of authority in a five hour long service (Hastings, 1979:162,230). He was retired from this status in 1990 in an effort to heal the split within the Nigerian Methodist Church which resulted from his actions.

for 'African traditional religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system' (Mbiti, 1969:1), whereas Idowu argued that 'we find that in Africa, the real cohesive factor of religion is the living God... and it is on this ground especially... that we can speak of the religion of Africa in the singular' (Idowu, 1973:104). This is not a serious difference of opinion, since the model still emphasises the belief they held in common in a supreme God widespread in sub-Saharan Africa.[146]

This belief, especially Mbiti's version of it, was strenuously attacked by the Ugandan anthropologist Okot P'Bitek in his African Religions in Western Scholarship (1971).[147] His book's criticisms have not yet been met by 'theological' writers. This may be due to its relative inaccessibility, or because it is occasionally ludicrously or even nastily polemical[148] and so can be ignored as hardly worthy of a response. Yet much more than Idowu, P'Bitek was

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[146]Mbiti was just as indebted as Idowu to Parrinder as the starting point for this belief in the centrality of a supreme being for African primal religion(s), and for other details, such as the possibility of classifying traditional faith(s). Although a much more gracious figure than Idowu and incomparably the better and more disciplined scholar, Mbiti has not acknowledged this indebtedness to Parrinder's seminal work, African Traditional Religion.

[147]The copy of P'Bitek's book I read had no date of publication anywhere in the book. I have assumed the date given by Rosalind Shaw in King, 1990:185.

[148]P'Bitek describes the apostle Paul as, among other things, an 'ugly little Jew', who was responsible for the nudist camps of the 1960s and for the prevailing free love philosophy of that decade (P'Bitek, 1971:115f.).

writing out of deep anger with the imperial system and its capacity to colonise the mind as well as lands.[149]

He contended that:

> True Uhuru [freedom] means the abolition of Western political and economic dominance for Africans, and the reconstruction of our societies on the basis of African thought systems. The study of African religions is one important way of understanding African ways of thought. (P'Bitek, 1971:119)

He attacked scholars in three related categories in 'present studies in African religions': Christian apologists mounting an attack on Western non-believers; nationalists fighting a defensive battle against western scholars' attacks on African culture; and missionaries 'scheming what they call "a dialogue with animism"' (P'Bitek, 1971:6). P'Bitek placed Parrinder in the first category:

> The Christian apologists like... Geoffrey Parrinder address their works mainly to Western scholars and churchmen. They use African deities to prove that the Christian God does exist, and is known also among African peoples. (P'Bitek, 1971:41)

This is only partly true. By the time P'Bitek's book was published, Parrinder was as influential among Africans as among a European readership, and knew it. Moreover, he might as naturally have been included in P'Bitek's third classification.

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[149]A measured epilogue by Ali Mazrui welcomes the book but delicately points to 'the great interaction between personal anger and patriotic anguish in the whole temper of the author's style' (p.134).

As a Christian apologist, Parrinder, so P'Bitek wrote, 'ever helped to select, hellenise and christianise an African deity' (P'Bitek, 1971:47). Moreover:

> In 1962 [sic for Parrinder, 1954:19] Geoffrey Parrinder warned that African nationalist scholars must not glorify the past so much that they come to believe that African religion might naturally have developed by itself to the heights of Christianity. (P'Bitek, 1971:47)

This is not quite the point Parrinder had been making. He had indeed written that:

> we [his readers, who were as likely to be African students as westerners] must not glorify the unknown past so much, as some African nationalists tend to do, that we come to believe that African religion might "naturally" have developed of itself to the heights of Christianity. (Parrinder, 1954:19)

The spatial imagery of height was indeed unfortunate and condescending, but Parrinder immediately went on to write that 'infusion of new ideas from the outside has benefited all religions'. Thus his major point was not the incapacity of Africans to elevate themselves, or even the superiority of Christianity. It was about the need for all faiths to learn from other groups[150] and how difficult this had been in the past in Africa, closed to the rest of the world.

More irenically, P'Bitek located Parrinder as one of those:

> outstanding scholars... [who have] brushed away the cobwebs that cluttered much of the nineteenth century speculative writings on African religions by carrying out systematic research using the languages of the

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[150]This is a recurrent theme in Parrinder's writings. See Chapter 3.3 and, especially, 3.4.

> people they studied.[151] One's quarrel with them is on their interpretation of the material... The interpretation of African deities in terms of the Christian God does not help us to understand the nature of the African deities as African peoples conceive them. (P'Bitek, 1971:49f.)

Rosalind Shaw's description of P'Bitek's work as a 'penetrating critique' (in King, 1990:185) is too appreciative; P'Bitek's scattergun technique misses as many targets as it hits. Nevertheless, Shaw convincingly maintains that it raises issues which deserve more than the 'resounding silence' (in Hackett, 1990:345) the book has met from those 'theological' writers whom it attacks.

Parrinder has not seen himself as one of the 'theological' writers:

> growing numbers of Africans are making valuable studies in this field [of traditional religion]. They are generally theologians... No doubt they are closer to the religion of their fathers than Europeans are, yet these modern academic Africans share little of the old faith and consider it largely from the outside. (Parrinder, 1969a:8f.)

The point is a fair one, though Africans writing in a post-colonial situation might find it arrogantly condescending. Still, it has been the imperial and post-imperial contexts which have shaped much writing by Africans about primal faith in the years since Parrinder first wrote about it; this setting has made it difficult for Africans to write about their ancestral religion in an impartial way. Mbiti

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[151]Ironically, P'Bitek may here be overestimating Parrinder's achievements, who relied on research assistants and translators (eg Parrinder, 1953:5).

and many of the 'theological' writers have assumed that to universalise the Christian belief in God and locate his presence in Africa dignifies the faith of their ancestors. Conversely, P'Bitek is among those who have wanted to break with the imperialist past altogether, ideologically and intellectually, as well as politically and economically.

This post-imperial setting focuses the question of how objectively African scholars have assessed Parrinder, an ex-missionary who worked in the twilight years of western imperial rule in Africa.[152] His achievements have been underestimated or played down not just by Idowu and Mbiti but far more widely, even though H.W. Turner rightly wrote that 'his [Parrinder's] work will be judged in relation to the primal religions of traditional Africa' (in King and Walls, 1980:158).

It would seem that Shaw's 'resounding silence' could as easily be applied to African assessments of Parrinder's work as to P'Bitek's book. In a book consisting of articles presented at a conference on African Traditional Religion in Nairobi in September 1987, Parrinder was mentioned only twice and in passing, even though the singular form of the term African Traditional Religion comes from his seminal book of that name on sub-Saharan African primal faith (Olupona, 1991:16, 139). Indeed, one of the contributors, J.O. Awolalu, a former Professor in Parrinder's own Department of Religious Studies in Ibadan (though long

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[152]See Chapter 3.3.

after he left) wrote that 'African Traditional Religion (A.T.R.) is the indigenous religion of the Africans' (in Olupona, 1991:111).[153] This silence about Parrinder and his achievements is most likely due to the natural desire of post-imperial African scholars to look beyond European intellectuals for their mentors. The result, however, has been to underplay Parrinder's achievements and influence as a scholar of African primal faith.

4.4 Parrinder's legacy.

Manifestly, the importance of Parrinder's work is inadequately understood by placing him, as Shaw does, as one of three creators of African Traditional Religion, a hegemonic but suspect authorised version of African religions (in Hackett, 1990:345). He devised the title and, ironically (given the silence or muted praise of subsequent African scholars about his achievements), in so doing summed up an assessment of African religion created by western scholars. Idowu, Mbiti and other Africans have built upon this edifice but cannot be held responsible for it.

From the perspective of modern studies of African primal faith, has Parrinder's interpretation outlived its usefulness? Have Parrinder's Christian and missionary credentials controlled and created his interpretation of a sub-Saharan African Traditional Religion to a degree which

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[153]Parrinder had provided a foreword to Awolalu's book, Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites: Awolalu, 1979:xif..

significantly distorts the phenomena it describes? He wrote in West African Psychology that:

> one result of modern study has been to show, indeed, how many "points of contact" there really are between the Old Testament and much of primitive religion; traces of totemism, ancestor-worship, animism, magic, demonology. (Parrinder, 1951a:212)

He got this from the first edition of W.O.E. Oesterley's and T.H. Robinson's Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development (1930), who argued that as Hebrew religion developed it continued to bear traces of its primitive origins:

> their persistence [the authors specified totemism, taboo, ancestor-worship, demonology, necromancy and magic] through the subsequent ages shows the hold that they had upon many in spite of the general advance in religious thought. (Oesterley and Robinson, 1930:xviii)

As a matter of fact, Oesterley's and Robinson's emphases upon such traces of primitive phenomena were heavily criticised, and were modified in the revised edition of their book. Nevertheless, Parrinder drew from the first edition not only material which helped him to fashion the second, third and fourth parts of his fourfold classification of West African religion, but also an evolutionary framework for the development of religion, so that within West African religion the juxtaposition of primitive and advanced features could be presented in a positive light, by comparing it to ancient Hebrew religion, whose development did not altogether eradicate traces of a

more primitive religion.[154] Characteristically, he emptied the term 'primitive' of pejorative meaning by comparing it, in a positive way, with his Judeo-Christian heritage.

Parrinder's comparison of West African with aspects of ancient Hebrew religion was not uncritical. The passage in West African Psychology which mentions these "points of contact" continued:

> Indeed, it may be considered a pity that the whole Bible has been imported, without curtailment or commentary, into so many African languages, where many Old Testament passages lend themselves so easily to misapplication, in both religion and morality; e.g. polygamy and the imprecatory Psalms.[155] Two hundred years ago, John Wesley said of the latter that they were "highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation". (Parrinder, 1951a:212)

Although Parrinder cannot be accused of uncritically comparing Hebrew and West African faith, his indebtedness

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[154]Much later, he wrote, ungrammatically (or else perhaps his speech was taped and then transliterated word for word), that:

> When I first read Oesterby [sic for Oesterley] and Robinson's "Hebrew Religion: its Origins and Development", (the first edition, the most important one, in which they picked up all kinds of references to primitive religious goings-on in ancient Israel, and gave very little space to the prophets, and were criticized for this. In the later edition, therefore, they gave a lot more room to the prophets, whom they did respect, and less of the primitive). But I was fascinated by this primitive stuff. This was what really gave me the first interest in the Old Testament as a living book. It became alive for me, and it was not just a bit of propaganda, but full of material: Rachel's tomb and all these famous places to which people went, because they believed that Rachel was still alive somewhere. (Parrinder, 1979b:9f.)

[155]Parrinder was no doubt thinking of the 'African-isation' of certain Christian customs in the separatist sects of West Africa. See further, Chapter 5.2.

to Oesterley's and Robinson's book suggests that he was inclined to see the primal faith of Africa through spectacles fashioned by his reading of Hebrew faith interpreted by two Christian scholars.[156] This is strengthened by words from his article 'Dahomey Half a Century Ago', written much later in 1989, which reminisces about his earliest experiences of African religion. His remembrance that 'in Porto Novo and Abomey there were temples of major deities, though they could easily be missed by a casual observer' (Parrinder, 1989a:267) alerts us to the fact that, as opposed to many other Europeans, he was far from being a careless onlooker. But he also recorded that:

> to the student of the Bible, Porto Novo provided an irresistible reminder of those places where spirits were worshipped 'on every high hill and under every green tree.' It was a veritable treasure-house of religion, not a museum because it was alive, but full of diverse religious expressions. (Parrinder, 1989a:266)

The quotation to which Parrinder referred is from 1 Kings 14:23. Interestingly, the passage in which it comes is about the sins of Rehoboam, King of Judah from 931-913 BCE who 'did what is displeasing to Yahweh', creating even more resentment than those before him who had adopted pagan practices 'on every high hill and under every spreading

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[156]Oesterley was Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis, King's College, University of London, and Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of London. Robinson was Professor of Semitic Languages, University College, Cardiff. The book is dedicated to the memory of A.S. Peake, a Primitive Methodist, who had been Professor of Biblical Exegesis in the University of Manchester.

tree'. For all his sympathy, even in 1989 Parrinder saw things through the eyes of a missionary, disapproving of much of what he observed as well as fascinated by it. Yet he displayed an enthusiasm and sympathy far removed from those of his contemporaries who were predisposed to regard African faith in a wholly negative way, even though his Christian faith undergirded and supported that enthusiasm and sympathy.

Certainly, Parrinder has been much more careful than many Africans in describing the role of the Supreme God. He has always described his fourfold classification as undergirding a polytheistic system, in which the High God has an important but by no means dominant role (Parrinder, 1949:16). He recognises that many Africans believe that such a Being is far above humans and their concerns,[157] which is not how he sees the Christian view of God. In an important article, 'Monotheism and Pantheism in Africa' (1970), he observed that:

> Numerous attempts have been made recently to work out coherent systems of theology for African religion, and my own suggestion of four categories of polytheism has perhaps provoked a reaction towards a dogmatic monotheistic teaching. I wish that more attention had been paid to my use of Tempels [ie his book La Philosophie Bantoue] during the last twenty years, because solutions to the problems of diversity may lie in that philosophy of powers. (Parrinder, 1970b:87)

Parrinder was here drawing attention away from his first categorisation, to the others. Idowu and Mbiti have

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[157]For example, in his chapter on 'God Leaves the World' in African Mythology, 1982:37-40.

concentrated on the first. Indeed, Mbiti was unconvinced by Placide Tempels' concept of *force vitale* which had inspired Parrinder, particularly in relation to those parts of his categorisation which were about African psychology; that is to say, not directly about the Supreme God. Mbiti flatly stated that 'the theory of "vital force" cannot be applied to other African peoples with whose life and ideas I am familiar', and commented that Tempels' main contribution has been 'more in terms of sympathy and change of attitude than perhaps in the actual contents and theory of his book' (Mbiti, 1969:10f.). That may well be true, but it portrays Mbiti, like Idowu and other African writers who have moulded African belief into Judeo-Christian templates, as far more concerned with the central importance of the Christian God in Africa, discerned in pagan religion, than Parrinder has been.

In her article, 'The Invention of "African Traditional Religion"', Shaw admits differences between Parrinder, Idowu and Mbiti, citing the fact that 'Parrinder... challenged the "diffused monotheism" interpretation [in "Monotheism and Pantheism in Africa"]' (in Hackett, 1990:345), but these distinctions are more important than she allows. She lacks a proper historical dimension to her work, which would have enabled her to see Parrinder as the seminal scholar who focused, sifted and articulated the work of previous western scholars and gave to Africans a model in which they could formulate and elaborate their own

concerns.[158] Shaw's description of African Traditional Religion as an 'invention' fails to understand how important it was in the 1940s, 50s and 60s to assert the importance of religion as an important factor in African life.

It may be that Parrinder's model has served its purpose, and another or others should take over. If so, then he might approve. In 1989, he wrote of the news that West African Religion had recently gone out of print:

> So it will pass into history or the back shelves of libraries. That is how it should be, for a great deal of research and writing has been done by younger scholars, often with a deeper knowledge of languages and customs. But there still seems to be a need for comparative studies, and it is to be hoped that they will be kept up to date and find a wide readership. (Parrinder, 1989a:273)

It is precisely over the possibility of comparison that some scholars who do not represent the 'theological' interpretation of African religions have taken issue with him. Benjamin Ray dismisses African Traditional Religions as among:

> descriptive surveys... They try to be exhaustive and to cover too many societies and too many types of religious phenomena. Consequently, these surveys present little more than superficial catalogues of

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[158]Her gracious comments in the article '"Traditional" African Religions' written on the occasion of Parrinder's 80th birthday ('More than anyone else at this time [the 1950s and 60s], it was Geoffrey Parrinder who set the new agenda: African religions, like other religions of the world, should be studied in their own right', in King, 1990:183) do not indicate either her agreement with his achievement, or that she has understood its historical importance.

> examples extracted in Frazerian fashion from concrete socioreligious contexts. For the most part, they concentrate upon "beliefs" without giving due recognition to the sociocultural and ritual fabric within which they are imbedded. Thus they reduce African religions to a set of "doctrines" analogous in structure to Western faiths: God, at the top, followed by a graded order of divinities, then the ancestor spirits, and lastly, the forest spirits and magical objects. (Ray, 1976:13f.)

Ironically, as H.W. Turner has observed, Ray's work 'has more basic assumptions and categories in common [with Parrinder's work] than might easily appear' (in King and Walls, 1980:159). Moreover, although it could be convincingly argued (Ray merely asserts) that 'a Parrinder-style catalogue' (Shaw in Hackett, 1990:345) does little justice to particular groups and locales, it is rather too easy to dismiss as mere cataloguing the alluring view that indigenous religions have certain categories in common. For example, Xiang Yang Li has noted certain significant points of contact between Parrinder's observation of the West African religious scene and the religion of China's minorities.[159] It may be just as important to look for these common features as for divergences. Shaw's argument that 'perceived similarities in their [ie African religious forms] morphology and content are largely...inventions: contrived products of their subsumption under the above categories' (in Hackett, 1990:349), may be to miss the wood for the trees.

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[159]In an unpublished essay dated 25/4/90, entitled 'Geoffrey Parrinder's Contribution on West African Religion and a Comparison with the Religion of China's Minorities'.

In a recent appraisal of Robin Horton's 1984 article, 'Judaeo-Christian spectacles: boon or bane to the study of African religions?', Parrinder wrote:

> [Modern Christians writers] tend to fit African beliefs into a Christian framework, finding a supreme God everywhere, and it is not difficult to criticize Idowu's notion of 'diffused monotheism.' But there are other viewpoints, and some of us of an older generation were concerned to discover and present the facts without prejudice. (Parrinder, 1994a:255)

'Facts without prejudice': perhaps Parrinder has been aspiring towards an unattainable objectivity. In his writings on African primal faith he has displayed his missionary and Christian background. But his has been a sustained effort to establish 'the significance of African religion',[160] against the claims of an earlier generation of anthropologists and others that primal African faith is valueless.

By and large, that endeavour may no longer be needed. Yet during Parrinder's writing career, some anthropologists have continued to play down the role of religion.[161] For

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[160]The title of Chapter 1 of African Traditional Religion.

[161]Others have underestimated the legacy of the dogmatic atheism or agnosticism of previous generations of anthropologists. For example, Brian Morris recorded that his approach to the subject was, as an atheist, one of 'critical sympathy', which led him to 'question whether Evans-Pritchard's belief that religion "can be firmly grasped only from within" is a valid one' (Morris, 1987:4). Evans-Pritchard was quoting, approvingly, Schmidt's confutation of Ernst Renan. Schmidt wrote that: 'If religion is essentially of the inner life, it follows that it can only be truly grasped from within' (Schmidt, 1931:6; Evans-Pritchard, 1965:121).

example, P'Bitek argued that 'in the Acholi worldview men have learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to a God as a working hypothesis' (P'Bitek, 1971:100).[162] Tantalisingly, he made nothing of his conclusion and, ironically, phrased his point in a rather hellenized and western way: the importance of religion may be different and is certainly wider than his words about God. Certainly, visitors to Africa and Asia are usually impressed by the importance of religion in the societies they meet, and the suspicion remains that some social anthropologists dismiss primal faith by operating with a very westernised and secularised view of religion.

Nevertheless, some of the most interesting recent work on African societies has been inter-disciplinary, bringing together social anthropology and Religious Studies. For example, Rosalind Shaw (in Hackett, 1990:346; cf in King, 1990:186) has mentioned as particularly important D.I. Nwoga's monograph The Supreme God as Stranger in Igbo Religious Thought (1984). Nwoga's argument that the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria have only recently and as 'the outcome of contacts with Europeans and Christian

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[162]This issue ranges wider than black Africa. Mary Douglas cited a study of the Basseri tribes of Persia who, though Muslims, take their religion about as seriously as members of a typical London suburb, and suggested that anthropologists should 'ditch the myth of the pious primitive' (Douglas, 1975:81). The language she uses suggests that Parrinder has not tilted at windmills in his efforts to make anthropologists understand the breadth and importance of religious issues (which are much wider than matters of personal piety), and that important points have still not been grasped by some of them.

theology' (Nwoga, 1984:71) acquired the concept of a Supreme God would invalidate the more exuberant, pan-African emphases of Idowu and Mbiti.[163]

Yet, historically, it has surely been inevitable that religion needed to be emphasised as an essential component part of African society, in order to rescue its importance from some of the more imperialist claims of secular-minded western anthropologists. Now that anthropology has become less univocal in its assertions about the falseness or irrelevance of faith in black Africa, there are more possibilities for fruitful mutual engagement with Religious Studies than when Parrinder began writing about African ancestral religion. It was not always thus. More than any other scholar, despite his Christian faith and missionary past, Parrinder has articulated and underlined the importance and even the nobility of African primal religion as a major factor among people of sub-Saharan Africa. His has been a considerable achievement.

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[163]Nwoga believes that mythical, linguistic and ritual evidence point to the depiction of *Chukwu* as the Supreme God as relatively new and his standing in that role as somewhat uncertain. People relate to their own *chi* or *eke* or *aka* or *okike* more usually and more naturally. He argues that though '[Chukwu] has been accepted into the logic of Igbo religious thought, He has NOT yet assumed the position appropriate to the Supreme Being in Igbo traditional ritual, or even in the total practice of the converts to Christianity. It takes many generations for a stranger to take over sovereignty, even a stranger as great as Chukwu' (Nwoga, 1984:71).

5. Parrinder: a Christian in West Africa

The former British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan [1957-1963], in a famous speech delivered in January 1960 to both Houses of the Union of South Africa's Parliament, declared that:

> The most striking of all the impressions I have formed since I left London a month ago is of the strength of African national consciousness. In different places it may take different forms, but it is happening everywhere. The wind of change is blowing through the continent [of Africa]. (quoted in Hastings, 1979:132)

When Geoffrey Parrinder first went to Africa in 1933, most of the continent was under direct foreign rule or else, as, for example, in the case of Egypt, subject to foreign 'influence'. When he left University College, Ibadan, a quarter of a century later in 1958, Nigeria was well on the way to independence, which came in October 1960. Other countries, notably Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) had already cast off alien government, and the next decade was to see the collapse of most of the colonial edifice in Africa.

So Parrinder was a Christian working in West Africa when the winds of change were picking up. How successful, as a sympathetic Christian observer of African faith, has he been in presenting his own religion as an answer to sub-Saharan Africa's hopes and needs at such an exciting and epoch-making time in the continent's history? Moreover, how clear-sighted was he in interpreting the process or processes by which Protestant Christianity engaged

fruitfully with primal faith at a time of such great change?

In particular, we shall examine his concerns about how 'orthodox' Christian churches in West Africa should deal with the issues of: the poor quality of worship in mainstream Protestant churches; the rise of the new religious movements (or, as he preferred to call them, separatist sects or churches); witchcraft; and, marriage. These concerns have continued to exercise his interest; we shall explore how and why, concentrating particularly on his later works about human sexuality.

5.1 Worship in the Protestant churches.

In his Religion in an African City (1953), Parrinder wrote that 'in the towns of Nigeria, the... ancient pagan religion of the country is declining' (Parrinder, 1953:1). His two chapters on 'pagan religion'[164] are designated, with a Wagnerian flourish, 'The Twilight of the Gods' (Parrinder, 1953:6-62). His was not a romantic view of primal faith.[165] He wrote that 'the old temples are diminishing in numbers [in Ibadan], and with the increase in education there seems little doubt that, as in Lagos, Christianity and Islam will increase' (Parrinder, 1953:62). He did not see African primal faith as one of the long-term

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[164]It is odd that Parrinder, usually a stickler for exact language, should have used the word 'pagan' about religion in the city of Ibadan, since pagan comes from a word meaning 'countryside' or 'heath'.

[165]See Chapter 4.4.

rivals to Protestantism for the religious commitment of Africans.

Yet all was not well in the Protestant mission-churches. Parrinder was greatly concerned by the poor quality of worship in them. As early as 1946, in an article on 'Worship in the Protestant Missions' in the *International Review of Missions*, he had protested about the sheer boredom of 'orthodox' worship. He told his readers that 'pagan worship in Africa is indeed often charged with a sense of awe' and that it is 'understandable that African sects draw crowds with their drums and dances and peculiar rites' (Parrinder, 1946:188). He also contrasted Protestant worship unfavourably with that of Roman or Anglo-Catholicism, which 'present the dramatic and ceremonial worship *par excellence*'. He observed that 'the African... may feel in this worship more of the presence of God' (Parrinder, 1946:188). Parrinder asked 'in what direction, then, should the worship of the non-episcopal churches improve and develop?'

He condemned the habit of borrowing matins from the Anglicans, which 'has often become a dreary liturgy'. The use of matins may itself have been a reaction against a free order of worship which:

> our members may feel... to be unworthy of God, or feeble in comparison with other churches. The sequence: hymn, prayer, lesson, sermon, collection, hymn, benediction, may be mere potted religion, with nothing very worshipful about it. (Parrinder, 1946:189)

Parrinder then took to task the first four parts of this sequence. He argued that Africans need to make use of their own lyrics and hymns, not least because English hymns become meaningless when translated into and sung in a tonal language, 'where rising inflections clash constantly and inevitable with descending notes, and *vice versa*'. Parrinder believed that:

> most of the Old Testament is unsuitable for mission work, and particularly for public worship... There is room for a wider sale of abridged editions of the Bible, instead of the 'whole' Bible. (Parrinder, 1946:190)

He believed the gospels to be central, and argued for the use of religious drama in church as part of the act of worship. He advocated preaching for 'moral conversion', not sermons which 'degenerate into an essay, in impeccable or legal English'. He preferred written prayers to the widespread custom of 'free' prayers, and urged the practice of kneeling.

His view was that church furniture is an important element in worship. There should be a sturdy Communion table, not a rickety one, and things should not be casually deposited on it. A lectern should be used for preaching. Flowers should be fresh and not withered, and there should be a cross, 'a symbol of our salvation'. Holy Communion should 'occupy a more central and frequent place in church life'. Although some argued that 'our people do not understand the meaning of Communion, or may misinterpret it' Parrinder thought that:

> it is worth risking a mixture of religious and magical apprehension, which is probably never quite absent in the African... If here it is recognized that Christ died for us and is truly risen and present with us, and that man should adore, repent and receive Him, then this Christian worship will set forth the Gospel and will prove 'a converting ordinance'.[166] (Parrinder, 1946:192)

In his second book to be published, West African Psychology (1951), Parrinder included a chapter, 'The Development of Religion', in which he agreed with Placide Tempels 'that African paganism, the ancient African wisdom, aspires from the bottom of its African soul towards the very soul of Christian spirituality' (Parrinder, 1951a:225, cf. Tempels, 1959:121). But Parrinder was not convinced that Christianity was yet ready to fulfil its role. He asked:

> How, then, can African religion best develop, so that it does not entirely disintegrate, before a sounder faith has grown up; lest seven devils worse come in and the last state be worse than the first? (Parrinder, 1951a:213)

In 1956, Parrinder wrote an article, 'Music in West African Churches', for *African Music*, in which he reiterated his criticism of singing transliterations of European hymns to European tunes. He observed that some small attempts had been made by mission-churches towards reform. For example, several hymnbooks had a supplement of local lyrics. But it was in the separatist sects that the reversion to

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[166]The phrase 'a converting ordinance' is that of John Wesley, who believed that the Lord's Supper was a sign which could convert its participants to God. This is unusual: 'There was little encouragement for such a notion in [Christian historical] tradition' (Rack, 1989:405). This is another illustration of Parrinder's indebtedness to his Methodist roots.

indigenous forms of music had taken place, along with dancing and the use of a wide variety of local instruments (Parrinder, 1956c:37f.).

Parrinder's accounts of the shortcomings of worship in the Protestant mission-churches of West Africa may seem very parochial. In fact, they afford a fascinating glimpse into the mind of Parrinder the pastor. He was principal of the seminary at Porto Novo when his first article on this subject was published in 1946, and responsible for training ministers. One can picture him urging his students not to accept the *status quo* when they became ministers of sometimes several churches, many miles apart. Rather, he wanted them to improve the quality of worship, so as to make the Protestant mission-churches more attractive in the face of competition from other religious groups.

Furthermore, his works on church life in West Africa reveal him as a convinced Christian, and specifically a committed Protestant. He was aware of the threat that Protestant worship faced from Roman Catholics. He wrote that 'To-day, in some former strongholds, ground is rapidly being lost: to Roman Catholicism, to "African" churches and to Islam' (Parrinder, 1946:187). In that same article, he wrote that 'to some of us, "Catholicism" may mean clericalism and false doctrine' (Parrinder, 1946:188), though, tantalisingly, does not reveal whether he includes himself among the 'us', who are, presumably, some of the Protestant Christians who were likely to read the *International Review*

of Missions.[167] Too much must not be made of these apparently critical references to the Roman Catholic Church. Parrinder nowhere makes a list of (as he might have seen it) the detailed theological shortcomings of Roman Catholic theology. In fact, in his earliest article, he had preferred the Roman Catholic attitude to nature and grace to the Protestant, Emil Brunner's (Parrinder, 1939:392). Rather, he would, as a Methodist missionary, naturally be perturbed at the thought of Protestant Christian witness losing ground, even to another part of the Christian Church.

5.2 African new religious movements.

One of the two other threats to the Protestant mission-churches were the 'separatist sects', as Parrinder called them in his chapter in Religion in an African City (Parrinder, 1953:107).[168] Rosalind Hackett has observed that:

> Geoffrey Parrinder was one of the first to write on new religious movements in West Africa. In his useful 1953 survey of religions in Ibadan, Nigeria (*Religion in an African City*...) - one of the earliest studies of religious pluralism in Africa - he identified seventeen distinct 'separatist churches'. He defined them as 'sects which have split away from, or sprung up in relative independence of, the older mission churches', with the observation that, given their growing importance, they were surprisingly absent in missiological literature. Parrinder had already encountered several of these movements in the course of his missionary work in neighbouring Dahomey (now

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[167]This journal was then published by the International Missionary Council, which became a part of the World Council of Churches in 1961, who now produce it.

[168]The third threat, Islam, will be discussed in Chapter 6.2.

> the Republic of Benin) and he was familiar with the landmark study of separatist churches in South Africa by Bengt Sundkler - *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* - which had appeared in London in 1948. (in King, 1990:192)

Characteristically, then, Parrinder was interested in and recorded a phenomenon that was, at that time, relatively unexplored. He had early in his missionary career come across the fact of African 'separatist sects'. When he was on his first tour in Dahomey, his interpreter, Victor Tano, had performed the same task for William Wadé ('Prophet') Harris, a Grebo of Liberia who baptised thousands of people in French West Africa in 1913 before he was deported by the French (Parrinder, 1987a:151). Almost twenty years later, he wrote that:

> Much has been written of the great numbers of people brought into the Methodist Church in the Ivory Coast, following on the work of Prophet Harris. Not so much is said of the numerous "Harrist" Churches in that country, which retain their independence, claim to have Harris's Bible, and to be his true successors, and in ritual and morality resemble many of the sects found elsewhere.[169] (Parrinder, 1952b:343)

Indeed, the West African coast was the 'first home and indigenous breeding ground' for the independent churches in the twentieth century, which is precisely where Parrinder was living at that time; though they were only numerous inland in Yorubaland (western Nigeria) by 1950 (Hastings, 1979:80). As a missionary in West Africa, Parrinder was no doubt inclined to see such movements as 'separatist sects'.

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[169]A good, recent and brief assessment of Harris is in Hastings, 1994:443-445, 456-459.

He believed that few of the sectarians were originally Roman Catholic members: 'The strong insistence on the authority of the Church and priesthood is probably the chief factor in the maintenance of loyalty' (Parrinder, 1952b:346). Most were aberrant from orthodox Protestant Christianity.

One of his articles, 'Separatist Sects in West Africa' discusses why new religious movements were attracting members of the Protestant mission churches. He played down the importance of polygamy in the 'various sects':

> One frequently hears the opinion expressed that the separatist Churches are just polygamous assemblies, with the easy assumption that this is why they began separate existence. Research has shown that this is not usually true. While most, but not all, the separatists do now permit polygamy, yet that was not commonly the cause of their split. Polygamy was allowed later, but even so some of the more important separatists forbid polygamy to their bishops and clergy, following the clear Biblical teaching (1 Tim. 3:2 and 12). (Parrinder, 1952b:345)

A more compelling reason for the growth of sectarianism was 'the desire for independence' (Parrinder, 1952b:345). Yet Parrinder argued that 'religious independence started long before the political nationalism, and is still largely aloof from politics, or at any rate no more involved in it than are the mission-church members themselves'. This seems a weak argument (admitting some link between the two but denying any importance to it), particularly in the light of his admission that 'it is noteworthy that some of the leaders of Nigeria's politics to-day are the products of mission-schools and not of the sects'. The two examples he

gave, Dr Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, both 'passed through Methodist schools', but he admitted that 'the latter is still Methodist in name though Azikiwe has founded his "National Church."' (Parrinder, 1952b:345). Here, Parrinder's relative lack of interest in the historical context of the declining years of empire in which he operated resulted in a confusing and inadequate assessment. He saw the connection between political and religious independence but did not satisfactorily analyse it. Instead, he emphasised his long-standing dissatisfaction with the quality of worship in the orthodox churches. Thus he declared that an:

> important cause of separation is the formalism of much of the life and worship in the mission-churches. Set prayers, unchanging liturgy, the "rigid and prosaic uniformity" of which Prayer-Book historians have complained even in England, are the order of the day not only in Anglican but also in Methodist and other churches in West Africa... This means that worship may be orderly and decent, but with that unimaginative piety to which we are accustomed in England. (Parrinder, 1952b:345)

Parrinder condemned the attempts by some orthodox churches to ban dancing, 'a prohibition which seems rank stupidity in Africa'.[170] He also condemned the prohibition of the use of drums and calabashes in worship, and the 'dreadful' hymns from England imposed on congregations which, among

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[170]This interdiction was not perhaps as stupid as Parrinder believed. His knowledge of the spread and character of Islam in West Africa was not as experientially grounded as that of Christianity and primal faith (see Chapter 6.2.). Islam's attitude to dancing is complex; forbidden in the mosque, it often finds expression in the community, as Parrinder well knew. Yet Islam has spread in West Africa, despite its ambivalent attitude to dancing.

other things, scarcely fitted the tonal requirements of African languages. He maintained that Christianity needed to appeal to the emotions as well as to the intellect of Africans. The orthodox churches were failing in this regard, and:

> the reaction against this is seen in the testimony meetings of the Christ Apostolic, where great stress is laid on dreams and visions; in the coloured robes and sashes of the Seraphim; and in the drums and dances of practically all the separatists. (Parrinder, 1952b:345)

This analysis seems just as weak as his lack of insight into the relationship between political and religious independence. The argument that the churches' lack of appeal to those who could be expected to attend lies in its outdated and dull worship has not only been made in the West African context. It has been made in Britain in the last few decades as well, in order to explain dramatically falling attendances at public worship. Boredom may be one factor, but it misses a number of points. In particular, why are people bored now, when their predecessors were not, or else were bored, but stayed committed to church attendance in greater numbers? Other and more profound factors need to be brought into play: sociological, intellectual, and so forth. To present dull worship as the basic problem of a church under severe challenge, whether in Britain or, as Parrinder does, in West Africa is far too simplistic.

Yet there may be more truth in his viewpoint than at first appears. To be sure, he came at the evidence from the perspective of a Methodist missionary, a valid though limited standpoint. No doubt the unattractiveness of worship in the mission churches did serve to work against the desire of many Africans for a more appropriate contextualisation of religious expression, which the 'separatist sects' offered. Moreover, these movements appropriated much Christian nomenclature, doctrine, and cultic practices, as Parrinder noticed.

Indeed, in Religion in an African City, he accepted the view of Sundkler that such movements emerged from the encounter with western culture, and particularly western Christianity. He distinguished three types in Ibadan (Parrinder, 1953:109). The first he named '"orthodox" separatists', because they seceded from their parent bodies (Protestant churches) over 'a desire for independence', and matters of church government and polygamy, but differed little in liturgy and doctrine. The second category were 'prayer-healing churches', which emphasised healing by prayer in place of the use of medicines and hospitals. Parrinder finally described the 'syncretist churches', which sought a fusion of Christian and non-Christian elements (Parrinder, 1953:109-130, cf Parrinder, 1952b:344). His analysis in Religion in an African City was quite thorough, and obviously based on considerable practical research during his first year in Ibadan, when he was free from teaching duties. Although the word

'sectarian' may seem judgemental, he did not use it in a condescending way. In fact, he observed that:

> The sectarianism of the separatist Churches, however, does not necessarily imply that they are unorthodox in doctrine or in discipline. Many of them are surprisingly orthodox, using the Bible faithfully, and following the Prayer Book of the Anglican Church. Only on the fringe does one begin to find a syncretism of Christian with pagan or Muslim practices. (Parrinder, 1953:108)

Under '"Orthodox" Separatists', he discussed four sects; he wrote about eight 'Prayer-Healing Churches'; and, in a less systematic way, on four 'Syncretist Churches'. He believed 'the greatest weakness of the separatists... [to be] their isolation from the main body of Christendom, here and overseas' (Parrinder, 1953:131). And although he criticised 'some questionable practices [that] have found their way into the separatist sects' (Parrinder, 1953:130), particularly those which replaced western medical practices, he ended his section on a positive and affirmatory note:

> it is heartening to see that many of the sects have made Christianity their own, so that, with them Christianity is no foreign religion; they have tried to enrich its services and even enliven its faith. The separatists are a large factor in the religious situation in the country, and one would suggest that the orthodox Churches might make more time for more friendly contact, with the aim of helping them to greater truth and unity. (Parrinder, 1953:131f.)

Yet is this too partial and Christian a perspective? Rosalind Hackett believes so. She is critical of his threefold interpretation of them and condemns his 'criterion of [Christian] orthodoxy as a tool for

classification... The sheer diversity and complexity of new religious movements in Africa today defies the use of simple definitions, typologies and explanations' (in King, 1990:194, 199).

Certainly such organisations have proliferated since the 1930s when Parrinder first heard of them. Although he was aware that they were rapidly expanding (Parrinder, 1952b:343), it would be easy and perhaps wise simply to accept Hackett's critique, noting also her ready acknowledgement that 'Geoffrey Parrinder's early interest in these movements... has served as an inspiration for many' (in King, 1990:199).

Yet her criticism of Parrinder's position is perhaps over-exaggerated. It is her view that:

> In considering the implications of Africa's new religious movements in general, it is important to view them not just as agents of indigenization or enculturation - interpretations favoured by theologians and by many historians of religion. They must also be seen as religious communities emerging from the interface between global and indigenous forces at the fringe of the modern world system. They are not 'halfway houses' between traditional religion and Christianity, but conscious and concerted attempts to reinterpret and reconstruct, through religious symbols and practices, the world which surrounds them. (in King, 1990:198f.)

Hackett's preference for the term 'new religious movements' locates such West African phenomena in a wider global context (a point which will be elaborated later in this section). From this global perspective, Parrinder's own viewpoint can look parochial, ironically even sectarian.

Yet it is arguable whether she does justice to Parrinder's threefold categorisation. According to Hackett, the first two types approximate to models proposed by Sundkler. Sundkler, where he had observed the first type in South Africa, had called it 'Ethiopian'; and Parrinder's second class approximated to Sundkler's description of the 'Zionist' Church in South Africa (in King, 1990:193). However, such links are only relatively meaningful, if at all. Indeed, Parrinder claimed that his threefold classification 'differs somewhat from that adopted by Dr Sundkler in South Africa, but it seems to fit the West African situation' (Parrinder, 1952b:344). In Religion in an African City, he was even more dismissive:

> Dr. Sundkler distinguishes two main groups of separatists in South Africa: what he calls the 'Ethiopian' type and the 'Zionist' type. The former includes those that seceded chiefly on racial grounds from the white Churches. The latter were inspired from Zion City, Illinois, and are of revivalist character.
>
> Such a distinction would not be helpful in Nigeria. Firstly, because the colour bar is less prominent, and while secessions came because of a desire for independence, it was not simply on account of colour discrimination on either side. Secondly, there are some who call themselves 'Ethiopian' who are of revivalist character. (Parrinder, 1953:108)

Moreover, although Hackett opens up an exciting global vista, uncharted by Parrinder and others who have interpreted West African sectarian movements simply as unorthodox Christian splinter groups, hers is simply one other perspective, which also has its weaknesses. An important criticism of Hackett's position is that although African new religious movements may 'not just... [be]

agents of indigenization or enculturation - interpretations favoured by theologians and by many historians of religion', that is one valid perspective on them. More to the point for a Methodist missionary like Parrinder, they raised wider theological and ecclesiological questions than Hackett had in mind. Specifically: how far, if at all, was God at work in them?; where and how were they deficient in providing ways of belief and practice congruent with an obedient Christian response to God?; how far did they signal the failure of orthodox churches, and in what ways?; are they Christian in any meaningful sense or senses? As we have seen, these are the issues that fascinated him, and they were and remain valid considerations, though certainly not the only ones.

Perhaps Parrinder can be faulted for giving the impression that the theological questions about these new religious movements were the only ones that mattered. In his much more recent anecdotal book Encountering World Religions (1987), he referred to such groups on only three pages as 'these separatists or sectarians, or Independents to give them a respectable title with a tradition of self-government' (Parrinder, 1987a:150). He still saw them through Christian spectacles.

As for new religious movements, over thirty years ago when much of his writings were on the subject of African religions, Parrinder saw the 'new religions' not as the sectarian churches but as Islam and Christianity, which he,

perhaps over-confidently or at least over-simplistically, predicted 'will come to dominate West Africa as they have other continents' (Parrinder, 1960:42). More recently, he has included the Unification Church in a chapter called 'Christian Syntheses' (Parrinder, 1987a:158-165).

Here again, he has a point. Let us take the Unification Church as an example. That organisation's depiction of the Revd Moon as the messiah and its appropriation of free-church styles of worship give credence to Parrinder's judgement that 'to some extent the Unification Church seems to be a Christian-Buddhist synthesis, a by-product of Christian missionary work in Korea but outside its organizations' (Parrinder, 1987a:162). Yet from another vantage point, Hackett's location of such a movement in a global perspective is also worth exploring. She writes that 'We have increasing evidence of links being developed between African movements and similar organizations in the United States, India and Europe, as well as with the new religions of Japan or the Unification Church, for example' (in King, 1990:199).

By emphasising global insights into African 'sectarian movements', Hackett fails, from Parrinder's more limited perspective, to deal adequately with such central Christian theological concerns as human sin. Parrinder, a Christian theologian, has not hesitated to condemn some of the 'new' sects. For example, he described 'the attempt at founding a "National Church of Nigeria and the Cameroon"... [as] a

political stunt' (Parrinder, 1952b:345; cf.Parrinder, 1953:128). He noted that it 'preaches an African God, and denounces the foreign religions from Canterbury, Rome and Mecca' (Parrinder, 1953:128). Here, his political naïvety, noted earlier in this section, comes to the fore. Azikiwe, the founder of the National Church (despite the fact that he had the advantage, as Parrinder saw it, of education in a Methodist school), was intent upon garnering political support in the twilight years of British rule in Nigeria. For Parrinder, religion is about worship of God or god-like figures, not a force to be harnessed to partisan or other secular ends. Not only the new religious movements but also the mission-churches could be dominated and manipulated by politically motivated or even unscrupulous people for their own ends; another example is Bolaji Idowu's perversion of Methodist custom and practice to create himself Patriarch for life of the Nigerian Methodist Church with the title, 'His Pre-Eminence'.[171] Although Hackett mentions such a 'charismatic and controversial founder and leader [as] Benson Idahosa' of the Church of God Mission (in King, 1990:197), and his links with Jim and Tammy Bakker in the United States, she does not ask religious or even political questions about the motives of such people, but rather sociological ones.

West African new religious movements can best be understood by examining them from a variety of perspectives.

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[171]See Chapter 4.3; and Hastings, 1979:162,230.

Parrinder's has more credibility in it than Hackett seems to allow, but her analysis is an important one, and admittedly more exciting than Parrinder's.

5.3 Witchcraft.

Parrinder discusses witchcraft in a number of articles, and one important book entitled Witchcraft (1958; reprinted in 1963 with extra material and the expanded, explanatory title Witchcraft: European and African). Most of his work on this subject was done in the 1950s. In 1956, in advance of his book, two articles came out: 'African Ideas of Witchcraft', and 'The Prevalence of Witches'. However, a decade later (1967), he wrote 'On the Wickedness of Witch Hunting', and much more recently, returned to the subject in Encountering World Religions (1987). His articles add nothing substantial to the book, upon which we shall focus the discussion.

Although Parrinder did not divide his work into sections, the 17 chapters fall naturally into two parts: chapters 2 to 8 on European witchcraft, and chapters 10 to 17 on African manifestations of that phenomenon. There is an introductory chapter; and an important transitional one, chapter 9, on 'Witchcraft in the Bible and the Near East'.

Parrinder began his introductory chapter:

> Belief in witchcraft is one of the great fears from which mankind has suffered. It has taken its toll literally in blood. The belief has appeared in many parts of the world, in one form or another. It became particularly prominent and developed in Europe, in the

> later Middle Ages and Renaissance periods. Still in modern Africa belief in witchcraft is a great tyranny spreading panic and death. (Parrinder, 1958:7)

This set the tone of the book. It was not just a contribution to scholarship (though it was that, too; Parrinder noted that it combined, for the first time, a brief survey of European witchcraft with an account of that occurrence in Africa (Parrinder, 1958:13)). It was also an attempt to describe a great evil which must be eradicated from human thought and practice.

The transitional chapter is important because Parrinder comes at the evidence as a committed Christian, though one sympathetic to African primal faith. Here, he argued that the scriptural justification offered in some Christian circles for the existence of witchcraft is groundless. He was not thinking of fundamentalist Christian groups, but rather of Christians of the past. They included James VI and I of Scotland and England (d.1625) and even John Wesley, who both believed the Bible to support the existence of witchcraft (Parrinder, 1958:112f.).

Parrinder made an interesting and to some extent convincing case. For example, he argued that the witch of Endor, summoned up from Sheol by the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 28, is actually a medium, as the Revised Standard translation makes clear. Moreover, the influential verse, Exodus 22:18, which states that 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live', is, in his view, actually unclear in its

meaning, since the Hebrew word *kashaph*, translated as 'witch' might better be rendered as poisoner.

If the Hebrew words used by translators of the King James Bible to denote witchcraft scarcely do so, what of actual practice?:

> There are a few indications that the European type of witchcraft belief may not have been unknown, to some degree, in biblical times. But how little there is! It is only to be found in some vague references in the Old Testament, and not at all in the New Testament which preserves a remarkable silence on the whole subject, as if the fresh and fervent religion of the day left no room for the occult. (Parrinder, 1958:117)

In his view, such traces of the later European type of witchcraft belief as exist in the Bible and other Jewish books of antiquity 'no doubt... formed part of the soil of witchcraft belief [in Europe], as did Greek and Roman ideas' (Parrinder, 1958:117). Although the Hebrew prophets spoke out against magic and mischief (e.g. Isaiah 8:19), they did not look for a victim: the scapegoat, sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, met this need (Parrinder, 1958:120f.).

Parrinder rightly prides himself on 'being known for having an interest in the definitions of religion' (Parrinder, 1987a:167). But his definitions of some of the Hebrew words about witchcraft lead one to reflect, not only whether he too easily conforms them to his liberal Protestant perception of reality, but whether he is not building too large a point on too narrow a base. Linguistic definitions

are not the only way to proceed to an understanding of the cultures of the Bible and other ancient societies.

The biblical material is more capable of supporting a belief in the existence and condemnation of witchcraft than he admits. For example, the prophets were unlikely to raise the matter of witchcraft at all if it were not sufficiently popular and believed in to be worth condemning. And to assert that 'in the New Testament there is not a trace of belief in witches' with the possible exception of Galatians 5:20 (Parrinder, 1958:121), is to fail to ask, for example, whether many would not interpret acts of healing by Jesus and other early Christian figures as witchcraft. And what kind of figure, one speculates, was Simon, recorded in Acts 8:9-24, who practised magic arts and astounded the Samaritan people?; can he simply be dismissed as a magician, Parrinder's verdict upon him? People in ancient times would not have divided witchcraft, magic, demonology and other associated phenomena into hermetically sealed compartments in the way of some textual critics.

Parrinder protested too much about the lack of phenomena which could have been regarded as witchcraft by many in ancient societies, though there is no need to dismiss his general point that there are no clear lines to be drawn from practices in antiquity to practices in Europe many centuries later. His humane views, deduced from or even read into the Bible, oddly reveal him as a kind of liberal fundamentalist. He showed, with some success, that

witchcraft has less basis than many might think, in the Christian scriptures. Yet his analysis of witchcraft would surely have been even more convincing if he had admitted that the Bible was written by people shaped by the presuppositions of their times, for bad as well as for good.

His brief discussion of other ancient societies also reveals his lack of historical imagination and methodology. In his view, although Islamic, Babylonian, Assyrian and Egyptian beliefs of antiquity 'may provide some [ideas that are] parallels to certain later European beliefs, yet there is no comparison with the developed witchcraft belief as it appeared in late medieval and renaissance Europe' (Parrinder, 1958:122). How strange to record these societies and empires in the reverse order than they appeared in time. Moreover, Islam looks an incongruous, indeed, anachronistic, spectre at the banquet of these otherwise dead civilisations.

Chapters 2 to 8 of Witchcraft describe European witchcraft beliefs, and the attitudes and practices they spawned, for which Parrinder saw little or no biblical warrant. Chapter 2 looks at 'European witch-hunting', describing its origins, development and enshrinement in law. Chapter 3 describes so-called 'Witches Meetings': nocturnal gatherings; covens and sabbath gatherings; dreams, wandering souls, and night flying; and animal familiars. Chapter 4 discusses 'Cannibalism and the Black Mass', and

charms to ward off danger. Chapter 5, 'Witches and Devils' describes who they were and how to recognise them and their accomplices. Chapter 6 looks at 'The Confessions' and chapter 7 at 'Witchcraft Trials in Britain'.[172]

Chapter 8 offers 'The Interpretation of European Witchcraft'. In this chapter, he relies heavily upon Margaret Murray's book The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (1921). Her thesis is that 'witches actually performed many of the deeds ascribed to them, but not by supernatural power' (Parrinder, 1958:98; cf.Murray, 1921:9); this is a middle way between the argument that witches exist and invoke supernatural help, and that which denies the facts of witchcraft *in toto*. He was sceptical of her thesis that belief in witchcraft was a legacy of ancient pagan English, and also possibly European, religion, and of her more elaborate theories in later books (Parrinder, 1958:101f.).[173]

Parrinder preferred, rather, to understand witchcraft from a psychological viewpoint. He made the point, on more than one occasion, that much of our understanding about witchcraft comes from the confessions of those who supposedly practised it (Parrinder, 1958:72, 98). In the 20th century, 'we now know so much more of the strange

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[172]He discusses witchcraft trials in America, too, in chapter 7 of his 1963, revised edition of Witchcraft: European and African.

[173]Parrinder believed her later books to have 'become more extreme and fantastic, involving far too dubious a re-writing of history' but this 'need not detract from the value of her earlier book' (Parrinder, 1958:101).

complexities of the human mind, that one would hesitate to assert that the confessions cannot have been invented. Some people like confessing, even what is impossible' (Parrinder, 1958:107f.). A characteristic dream involves flying (as many witches are supposed to do), and dreams, as Sigmund Freud has pointed out, bring strange and violent thoughts to the surface (Parrinder, 1958:108). It is a pity Parrinder did not explore the psychology of witchcraft further. It would seem a more fruitful explanation of the phenomenon he describes than exorcising the material about it from the Bible. Moreover, he mentioned Freud in four places (Parrinder, 1958:108, 156f., 192, 199) but not Carl Jung (1875-1961) at all. Yet Jung's work on dreams and their meaning and his interest in the various workings of the human psyche might have been even more helpful to him.

For the section on European witchcraft in his book, Parrinder was dependent on secondary sources. He had, however, witnessed African witchcraft at first hand. So, as well as using other scholars' work about witchcraft in Africa, he had his own first-hand observations to offer. It is not surprising, then, that the chapters on African witchcraft make for more interesting reading than those on European, since he spoke from personal knowledge and pastoral concern.

In his view, not all African tribes believe in witches, but many do, and their beliefs:

can be briefly summarized as follows. The witch is generally female. She goes out at night and meets in an assembly with other witches. She leaves her body in her hut and flies to the assembly, often as an owl, other bird, or animal. The witch preys on other people and procures a victim for consumption in the assembly. The blood of the victim is sucked or its members eaten. This causes a wasting disease to his physical body... Children are often thought to be eaten as [sic for by; cf. Parrinder, 1963b:139, where 'by' is written] witches. Any disease may be taken as a sign of their evil machinations...

There is an astonishing resemblance between these modern African beliefs and those of Europe centuries ago. Apart from the peculiar names, such as devils, covens, and Sabbaths, and practices supposed to be perverted from Christianity, like the Black Masses and baptisms, so much of European belief is clearly similar to that of Africa (Parrinder, 1958:133)

Parrinder admitted that there is little solid evidence for the origin of this similarity. He was content to restrict himself 'to the question of witchcraft and avoid the entanglements of arguments about the origins of cultures' (Parrinder, 1958:134). Characteristically, he was eager to compare different cultures' beliefs about witchcraft. In a general sense, his observation of certain crucial similarities is convincing. But when he wrote about the resemblance between names, he missed the point that, in rendering terms from African languages into English ones, there would have been a natural tendency for earlier translators to use an English term which approximated to something they already knew. But such approximations would have been inexact, and were no doubt often misleading.[174]

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[174]See, for another example, Edward Conze's discussion of Christian translations of Buddhist terms: Chapter 8.1.

His material on witchcraft in Africa was intended to eradicate European prejudices about certain African practices. In particular, the witch-doctor has been much maligned:

> no name has suffered more from distortion and misunderstanding than that of the witch-doctor. To many people the witch-doctor is the chief witch, the devil of the magical art. Even colonial governments have legislated against him while leaving worse people unmolested. (Parrinder, 1958:177)

In reality, the witch-doctor heals those thought to have been bewitched. He is a reputable man in Africans' eyes. The confusion is perhaps understandable, in that 'he has to be like witches so that he may overcome them by his more powerful spirit' (Parrinder, 1958:178). He deals in magic and herbalism, may be an acute observer of human nature, has to be trained for his task, and has various 'cures' for those whom he believes are in the power of witchcraft. Thus, Parrinder did not condemn witch-doctors:

> The witch-doctors are greatly sought after, much feared, but also highly respected. No doubt they do good in restoring confidence in their patients. In some of their methods they are like psychiatrists; indeed is it not the fashion in England to call psychiatrists witch-doctors? No doubt some witch-doctors are extortionate and consciously exploit the credulity of their fellows. That is not peculiar to African religious life. (Parrinder, 1958:185)

Another of Parrinder's achievements has been to describe 'The Social Setting of Witchcraft'. In his chapter on this topic (16), he offered six reasons why witchcraft existed, and, indeed, was on the increase in Africa. First, there is 'sexual antagonism': it seems significant that witches are

nearly always women, who are kept in subjection by men who accuse them of practising black arts. Then, there are 'kinship stresses', particularly jealousy, not least between co-wives. Each can accuse the other of harming children who fall sick. Some women make 'unnatural accusations' about their own malign deeds towards members of their family, a phenomenon slowly being explained by modern psychiatry. There may be 'awkward people', whose queer and unsociable behaviour can be put down to their being witches. In an 'unsettled society', when Africa was passing through turbulent political, religious and social changes, witchcraft can be offered as one reason for the traumas. Then there is 'the desire for a scapegoat' in every society. This short but helpful analysis (Parrinder, 1958:187-199) ends by revealing Parrinder's pastoral concern in writing this book, that people should cease to suffer:

> Witchcraft belief may have had some value in the past. Some of our medical and herbal knowledge may have come from the magical charms of witch-doctors. But the story of witchcraft has too constantly been a tale of cruelty and suffering... The positive evils have been great. The tyranny of men over women, the vengefulness of rivals, the hostility to strangers, the oppression of the weak and the old, the debasement of religion, the lowering of morality and kindness, all have had their part in this dreadful business. One must always remember the obsessions and fears of those who have been accused of witchcraft, and not least their sufferings: sleeplessness, homelessness, public ostracism, torture, death. (Parrinder, 1958:199)

What, then, can be done:

> to destroy this pathetic fallacy. An enlightened religion, education, medicine, and better social and

> racial conditions, will help to reduce 'man's inhumanity to man'. (Parrinder, 1958:203)

The 'enlightened religion' Parrinder had in mind would be Christianity:

> religion is the only spiritual force that can give a better faith than that of witchcraft. In the conflict of ideas, which counts so much in the modern world, a pure religion is the only alternative to a debased one. Only perfect love can cast out fear.
>
> In modern Africa Christian faith and morality are slowly replacing old superstitions and evil practices, bringing members of different tribes and families together, and helping men to adapt themselves to the strain of modern life. (Parrinder, 1958:203)

How convincing is his championing of Christianity? Earlier in the book, Parrinder had noted the church's contribution to the sufferings of so-called witches, torturing them and then putting them on trial and burning them (eg Parrinder, 1958:78-82). On the other hand, he observed that Matthew Hopkins, a lawyer from Suffolk (d.1647), 'the chief instigator of some of the most groundless executions for witchcraft in England... [who was] one of the wickedest men in the country... [was] an energetic man and not unduly religious' (Parrinder, 1958:94). Moreover, 'if the Church had been responsible for much shortsighted action, particularly on the continent [of mainland Europe], it should be noted that some of the clergy helped to end the superstition' (Parrinder, 1958:100). Nevertheless, it is difficult, having read Parrinder's account of European witchcraft, to draw any easy or logical conclusion that the Christian religion, as actually practised, would lead to

the end of witchcraft in Africa if it were followed. Arguably, the end of witchcraft in Europe was hurried along by the enlightenment and the rise of secularism. Parrinder, whose interest is in religion, fails to mention the contribution to the demise of beliefs in witchcraft of the new ideas of the 'age of reason'. His brief observation that 'Bishops of the Church in England commended the "learned and inquisitive age" of the seventeenth century' (Parrinder, 1958:111), puts the beginning of the end of witchcraft in England too early,[175] and does not convincingly link the Christian religion with any meaningful role in destroying the phenomenon. Indeed, it has never completely disappeared, as Parrinder ruefully acknowledged in a recent book:

> Having written a book on witchcraft in Africa and Europe I have been trying to live it down ever since. It was intended as a critical study, and meant to help people in Africa who may be accused of witchcraft or join in accusations against others, usually women, suspected of anti-social activities. But interest in witchcraft has brought invitations to many kinds of society in Europe, religious, social and political. (Parrinder, 1987a:170f.)

Yet Parrinder, as a pastor and missionary, would not only or even primarily have been persuaded of the efficacy of the Christian faith solely on rational, logical grounds. Least of all would this be the case about such a phenomenon. Personal experience and counselling also count for a great deal. In his earliest book, he wrote that:

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[175]In England, statutes against witchcraft were repealed in 1736. The last execution had taken place in 1712.

> People become very distressed and ill by the obsession that they may become witches. A woman of my acquaintance had been invited to join a witch to hunt for souls. On refusing she had been cursed, and soon fell ill. She believed the witch was clinging to her invisibly and sucking her life away; she was only cured when a stronger and more wholesome faith inspired. (Parrinder, 1949:183f.)

That 'wholesome faith' was mainstream Protestant Christianity.[176]

5.4 Marriage.

Parrinder has dealt with marriage in a number of his more general works, but specifically in the following articles and books: 'Christian Marriage in French West Africa' (1947); The Bible and Polygamy (1950); Sex in the World's Religions (1980; to be reprinted by Oneworld Publishers in expanded form in 1996); 'Theological Attitudes towards Sexuality' in a work called Heaven and Earth (1986) edited by A.A. Linzey and P. Wexler[177]; and 'A Theological Approach' in a book entitled Theories of Human Sexuality (1987) edited by J.H. Geer and W.T. O'Donohue[178]; and Son of Joseph (1982).

His concern about this issue began in West Africa. His views then are given with particular clarity in The Bible and Polygamy, so we shall first concentrate on this work. It is a short book of 78 pages. Its title underlines

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[176]Interview with Parrinder, 1/11/94.

[177]Worthing, Churchman Publishing:87-103.

[178]New York, Plenum:21-48.

Parrinder's chief concern, polygamy, which he treated in its 'popular employment to describe the state of a man who has more than one wife' (Parrinder, 1950a:1).

Most of the book is given over to a discussion of polygamy in the Old and New Testaments. Chapter 9 gives a brief account of developments in Christian history, concluding that 'the general tradition of orthodox Christianity, eastern, western, and reformed, has been against polygamy' (Parrinder, 1950a:61).

Broadly speaking, Parrinder employed the notion of a progressive development in human religious thought. He described how monogamy, the norm in ancient Greek and Roman society, became so in the Hebrew tradition:

> Polygamy belongs to the barbaric stage of society. As the Hebrews developed, they, like other races, came to leave polygamy further and further behind. For long it was not possible to condemn it categorically for everybody, with the example of Abraham in mind, and in the absence of a principle of teaching history as a development from lower to higher. (Parrinder, 1950a:35)

The teaching of Jesus on the subject of marriage caused Christians to set their face against polygamy:

> Above all, it is the intimate and single union of man and wife, which Jesus accepted and exalted, that is the clear teaching of Jesus in support of monogamous marriage and the foundation of Christian teaching in this matter. (Parrinder, 1950a:49)

In a final chapter (10), he maintained that 'the causes that kept polygamy in being no longer operate' (Parrinder, 1950a:65). He enumerated some of these: the surplus of

women in times of tribal warfare was no longer a problem since those days were half a century before; the discredited notion that men are naturally a polygamic sex; equally implausible beliefs that women are subject to and the chattels of men, or even their property; the desire for children, which modern medicine can usually solve more effectively than polygamy; the custom of abstaining from sexual relations during the breast-feeding of babies, which is mere superstition (Parrinder, 1950a:65-70).

The book's sub-title is 'A Study of Hebrew and Christian Teaching'. In this work, Parrinder offered Christianity as the answer to a practice, widespread in Africa, but incompatible with a civilised society. He observed that 'a society that aims at being civilized should abandon polygamy. It is outmoded, in Africa just as much as in Europe, since the world is rapidly becoming one' (Parrinder, 1950a:65).

Parrinder returned to the subject of marriage in Religion in an African City (1953). Chapter 9, entitled 'Religion and Morality', has four sections on: polygamy; the Churches and polygamy; marriage; and divorce. Much of the argument repeated that of The Bible and Polygamy.

This is a disappointing chapter, for two reasons. First, however important the issues he discussed may be, they do not deserve to be overestimated as 'Religion and Morality'. Morality is more than human sexuality, as Parrinder had admitted in The Bible and Polygamy, where he wrote that

'there are other sins as bad [as polygamy], and some sins of the spirit, such as pride and bitterness, that are worse' (Parrinder, 1950a:65). Moreover, as we shall argue later, there is more to be said even about human sexuality than he does.

Secondly, this chapter offers mere generalisations. At its best, Religion in an African City offers reflections about a particular geographical location, Ibadan. But Parrinder included no statistics about polygamy and monogàmy in the city, nor even an anecdotal or impressionistic account of such practices. Instead, Parrinder wrote about Nigeria as a whole or, occasionally, its southern part. He began by observing that:

> One of the greatest problems of Christianity in this country has been the establishment of an ideal of marriage, in accordance with traditional Christian teaching. In this matter, there has been difference of practice between the orthodox and separatist Churches. (Parrinder, 1953:163)

The separatist churches, in his judgement, 'are noted for their greater tolerance of polygamy among their members, with the exception of the Christ Apostolic, which is almost as strict as a mission church' (Parrinder, 1953:165).

Where the chapter is helpful (though not really about Ibadan but the country as a whole) is in recognising that traditional African practices made the Christian ideal of monogamous marriage hard to achieve. The Marriage Ordinance in Nigeria of 1914 had merely confused the situation, because it defined monogamy as Christian marriage, when

native forms of marriage could also be monogamous (Parrinder, 1953:170).

It was his conviction that 'provisions need to be made to stabilize marriage in the present confusion' (Parrinder, 1953:171). In an earlier article on 'Christian Marriage in French West Africa', he had noted how important the churches regarded the role of the political authorities in such matters, and argued that the French authorities should (as in the Belgian Congo, now Zaïre) 'legalise customary monogamous marriages'. Then 'the Church would give her blessing to all registered marriages, whether by native or European law, and thereby uphold their monogamous character, and contribute more effectively towards the raising of African custom to the Christian ideal' (Parrinder, 1947b:268). Returning to the subject in Nigeria, he noted that the Marriage Ordinance had made no provision for divorce, about which the mainstream churches had relatively strict views (Parrinder, 1953:172f.). Parrinder thought that problems which often issued in divorce in West African marriages, such as childlessness, 'will take generations to solve' (Parrinder, 1953:174). As he saw it, monogamy would spread, not through 'the negative attitude to sex that has sometimes been shown' but from much more serious and fundamental teaching as to the purpose of marriage, the status of women, and the stability of the community (Parrinder, 1953:174).

Parrinder recognised that the mainstream churches were uncertain how to deal with polygamists who sought to become Christians. He argued for a lenient interpretation of Christian teaching: polygamists of older years should be permitted baptism, if not admittance to Holy Communion; although all lay officials should be monogamists, senior polygamists could serve in other ways, for example, on committees; native marriages should be blessed in church. These practices could be reviewed after a decade or two (Parrinder, 1953:196). From a contemporary perspective, some of these suggestions may seem condescending, trivial or even amusing. But Parrinder wrote as a pastor and missiologist. Africans at the edge of mainstream church life needed to be cared for and not spurned, and he was sufficiently compassionate and hard-headed to frame suggestions how this might come about.

Indeed, this pastoral and missiological concern is central to any discussion of Parrinder, the Christian in West Africa, and shines through his writings on worship, new religious movements, witchcraft and marriage. What is also important is how far he has remained interested, to greater or lesser extent, in these themes. His interest in worship is shown especially in his thematic book Worship in the World's Religions (1961).[179] He has been involved with programmes of the Unification Church, attending an ICUS

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[179]See Chapter 3.5.

conference in 1976[180] and a conference on 'Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism' in 1988; and has written on Scientology.[181] Although his book on Witchcraft was published in 1958, just after he went to London, the work for it was done in Ibadan. He has returned to this theme, but it does not seem to be as close to his heart as the others.

5.5 Post-African writings about sex.

Rather more interesting than any of the other themes has been his return to that of marriage, and particularly the wider context of human sexuality. In this area, since his return from Africa he has branched out rather more widely from his original subject of polygamy, though the matter of family life has remained central to his concern. Of the matters he raises, we shall assess the importance of his work Sex in the World's Religions (1980), and then concentrate on the assumptions he makes in his works about the role of women.

Sex in the World's Religions is the last and best of his thematic studies. The themes of worship and mysticism had been handled over a relatively wide field by previous writers. Not so, sex. He claims, rightly, that 'it seems to be unique in making a study of sex and religion together, as seen by the major living religions' (Parrinder, 1980:3).

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[180]See Chapter 3.4.

[181]See, *inter alia* and especially, his chapters on 'Christian Syntheses' and 'Borderline Religions' in Parrinder, 1987a:153-175.

He included chapters on: Hinduism; Buddhism; other Indian traditions, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, and tribal religions; Chinese religions; Japanese faiths; African primal faiths; Islam; Judaism; and Christianity. A final chapter discusses 'modern influences': medicine, psychology, women's rights, and religious encounter.

Parrinder discusses sex in two senses: gender, what it means for men and women to be full human beings; and 'more explicitly their physical union' (Parrinder, 1980:1). He declares that:

> This book is not for... those who regard sexual intercourse as sinful, polluting, or inferior, and they are warned not to read it... On the other hand, this is not for the salacious... It is meant to be factual and scientific. (Parrinder, 1980:3)

He described his purpose in collating information on this subject over many faiths as 'trying to see others as they have related sex and religion to each other, and thereby perhaps to see ourselves better' (Parrinder, 1980:3). There is therefore, as with his books on worship and mysticism, implicit, not explicit, comparison between faiths. Even so:

> This study has aroused numerous reflections, not least on the complex history of my own ancestral faith in this field. The activities of human beings often appear strange or foolish, but like other preoccupations the sexual life of mankind illustrates both the joy and the sadness that appear in human affairs. (Parrinder, 1980:3)

Since 'some religions are better documented than others' (Parrinder, 1980:3), his was a considerable achievement in locating and putting together material in an orderly,

fascinating and instructive way. Another remarkable feat is that he displayed none of the judgmentalism and embarrassment of many missionaries of his and preceding generations about sex. He recorded the words of his friend and mentor, Edwin Smith, about the Ba-ila, that 'to them, the union of the sexes is on the same plane as eating and drinking, to be indulged in without stint on every possible occasion' (Smith and Dale, vol 2, 1920:35f.). Clearly amused, Parrinder noted that Smith 'wrote that "there is much that is unpleasant in this part of our subject", and he put some of the descriptions of sexual detail in Latin' (Parrinder, 1980:127).

However, Sex in the World's Religions did not remain in print for long, and has not therefore had the attention it deserves. Its subject-matter still remains an embarrassment to some. For its reprinting in 1996, the publishers have insisted on a new title, Human Sexuality in the World's Religions, even though the original was more eye-catching and could therefore hope to sell more copies.

The issue of sex in a wide sense raises that of the role of women. Here, Parrinder proves to be less forward-thinking and more a man of his generation. However, it would not be sensible to criticise him for his use of sexist language. This, of course, has been common until recent years, though it seems ironic that such a relatively recent work as Sex in the World's Religions should open with the sentence 'Sex and religion are two of the commonest concerns of mankind',

rather than humankind (Parrinder, 1980:1). There is some indication that he has recently modified this language. For example, his recent booklet on The Sayings of the Buddha, begins 'The Buddha was one of the greatest teachers of humanity' (Parrinder, 1991:7), when the last word might easily have been 'man' or 'mankind' just a few years before.

Much more important and revealing are the blind-spots in his liberalism. In his earlier discussion of polygamy, he wrote that it 'is degrading to women, and is therefore incompatible with that equal status of women which has come to be accorded in Christian countries' (Parrinder, 1950a:49). Yet not all Christian countries accord women equal status, nor does Parrinder specify what it means. On the same page, he indicated boundaries to this equal status:

> Christian teaching demands the emancipation of women. This need not lead to extremes, and obviously women have some different functions from men. But women must not be treated as chattel, but as a full personality. (Parrinder, 1950a:67)

The boundaries are set by men. Parrinder views women from the perspective of how men treat them, rather than attempting to hear them articulate their own concerns. This standpoint predominates even in Sex in the World's Religions. Although he includes three pages on 'Women's Rights' (Parrinder, 1980:244ff.), and he implicitly reveals liberal sentiments, for example, his belief that the ordination of women should be permitted in Christian

churches,[182] his is not a notable contribution to human equality.

One example is his discussion, in a chapter on 'Islamic Customs' of the 'famous Thousand and One Nights' which he describes as containing humorous anecdotes and love romances. Yet he admits that one of the sources for the framework tale within which the stories are set is 'an old Persian book which told of a king who would marry a woman for one night and kill her in the morning' (Parrinder, 1981:166f.). He judges that 'the Thousand and One Nights tells of many sexual adventures, and often shows women enjoying sexual intercourse as much as men' (Parrinder, 1981:167). This is to miss the point that the stories were surely told by men about women. They reveal a cruel view of the world, élitist, racist and sexist. Women are the victims of men's belief that they are libidinous unless severely guarded. Their value is as objects of desire, passive and submissive. They are expendable items. Shahrazad, who amuses the king with tales each night and by bearing him children, survives by working within this world-view, not by challenging it.

Another example of Parrinder's blindness to issues that exercise the contemporary women's movement is his description of the vision of the Christian saint, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), in which a golden spear penetrated her

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[182]Women have been ordained ministers in Parrinder's own British Methodist denomination since 1974.

entrails and left her consumed by the great love of God. He comments:

> Since the time of Freud we can hardly avoid seeing the phallic symbolism of the great spear, though Teresa would have been horrified at such a sexual interpretation of her vision. She was ardent but celibate, seeking ever more severe renunciation of the world, and her longings were sublimated into divine love. (Parrinder, 1980:218)

Maybe so. But one may ask whether Freud's legacy has been negative as well as positive, so that it is now too easy to locate sexual meanings when others may be present and even predominate? It would be interesting to know how Teresa interpreted what she saw. Would she have been as horrified as Parrinder thinks? What other alternatives than celibacy were open to her, if she wanted to fulfil herself outside the conventional roles of wife and mother? Were those roles, therefore, tyrannous to some women, and are they still, in certain circumstances? These are among the questions which have not interested Parrinder, or perhaps have not occurred to him.

Parrinder would not think the functions of wife and mother oppressive. He is deeply committed to 'traditional' family life. Writing of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, he observed:

> Who reads it today? For to some of its fine simple language must be contrasted... the whole picture of a miserable earthly life, and salvation by flight from

> wife and family, to struggle eventually to the rather sugary celestial city.[183] (Parrinder, 1964a:77)

His recent book Son Of Joseph attempts to rehabilitate the nuclear family. He looks at biblical and extra-biblical evidence to reject the virgin birth and other related beliefs, and to present a picture of Mary and Joseph as a couple with a growing family of boys and girls, of whom Jesus was the eldest:

> Joseph was the father of Jesus, Mary was Joseph's wife in the fullest sense, and the family at Nazareth completed the picture. Christmas and the Nativity are about the family, and they can be freed from fantasies that mislead in both theology and devotion. (Parrinder, 1992b:123)[184]

This picture establishes the humanity of Jesus, which is an important difference between his incarnation and the descents of Hindu avatars.[185] It also distinguishes him from the docetism implicit in the miraculous stories surrounding avatars and the Buddha. For once, Parrinder approves of Emil Brunner, who, in The Mediator, wrote that 'the majestic wonder of the Incarnation of the Son of God is not made greater but smaller by the biological theory of the

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[183]Ironically, Andrew Walls used a phrase from Bunyan, 'a bag of needments', as an African praise name or *izibongo*, in order to honour Parrinder on the occasion of his 70th birthday. See his article in King and Walls, 1980:142; and the Conclusion, below.

[184]cf. Parrinder, 1992b:16, where he writes: 'The... motherhood of Mary, and fatherhood of Joseph, the richness of family life given and blessed by God, these are the pictures provided by the New Testament in patterns of both holy and normal living'.

[185]See Chapter 7.4.

procreation through one sex alone' (Parrinder, 1970a:212, quoting Brunner, 1934:325).

This celebration of the 'traditional' or 'normal' family seems somewhat nostalgic in the present turbulent climate for marriage and the family in western Europe. Moreover, although Parrinder's book gives a thorough presentation of early Christian evidence, he lacks the historian's eye for the telling detail. There are indications that Jesus had other priorities than a nuclear family and even women's rights.

Much earlier than in Son of Joseph, Parrinder had written that 'Women's rights are based upon the teaching and example of Jesus' (Parrinder, 1950a:49). Any historical study of the life of Jesus would certainly uncover his remarkably open and intimate relationship with women. Yet he was a man of his times with a strong sense of a specific vocation, not a purveyor of traditional western-European liberal values. Since Peter had a mother-in-law (Mark 1:30f.), it may be conjectured that Jesus took him away from his wife and family as well as his occupation when he called him to be a disciple. This does not accord well with Parrinder's commitment to 'traditional' family life.

5.6 Parrinder's achievements.

The previous chapter showed how, in contradistinction to those scholars who regarded sub-Saharan African primal religion with disdain, Parrinder presented it as

respectable to European religious people, polytheistic, to be sure, but with a strong belief in a High God. It had the status to be compared with Christianity and other faiths. This chapter has illustrated how he nevertheless believed that main-stream Christianity was the progressive religion which was fighting for the soul of Africa. Primal religion was not valueless but it was passing away, and orthodox Christianity, not the 'separatist sects', should take its place, incorporating what was good from it but recognising that there were evils, too: witchcraft and polygamy above all, despite the positive things that could be recorded of them. Even here, however, Parrinder's innate liberalism and commitment to the comparative method led him to remind his readers that witchcraft and polygamy were not unique to African religion and culture. Since European societies had once practised them, and because Parrinder had a progressive view of historical development, he could boldly hope that black Africa, under the influence of Christianity, would also outgrow them.

There are limitations to his interpretation. In the wake of two world wars, not all scholars would be so confident of the notion of progress in history. His teachers at Richmond Theological College subscribed to it, however: it was fashionable in much English inter-war theology, which came late to the influence of Barth and other mainland European theologians who were then writing in deliberate opposition to a liberalism they believed had failed both the Christian gospel and western culture. It is indeed regrettable that

Parrinder encountered Barthian theology through the perspective of Kraemer and in the context of other faiths, since his liberalism could have been creatively challenged by Barth's more central critique of religion in a secular-liberal, western European context.

Certainly, much of Parrinder's liberalism does seem outdated, that of English Christianity of the 1920s and 1930s, his formative years. We have seen, with regard to his attitude to the role of women, that it is a cautious philosophy, which tends to encourage gracious statements and actions from within its own world-view but does not quite see through another's eyes.

Furthermore, Parrinder's commitment to Christianity as the religion of sub-Saharan Africa's future is not as obvious to contemporary readers as it has been to him. That seems now, as it must have seemed to many of his readers during his African years, to be an article of faith rather than a description of reality. For in those parts of Africa where Parrinder lived, Dahomey, Ivory Coast and western Nigeria, Islam was far more dominant than Christianity. So we now turn to his interpretation of Islam as a religion.

6. Parrinder: Orientalist?

Parrinder has written quite extensively on Islam. As well as sections on this religion in his thematic works, and occasional references to it in several more publications, he has written a major book on Jesus in the Quran (1965, reprinted 1976). He included Islam among Africa's Three Religions (1976; a reprint of his Religions in Africa (1969)). He has written a number of articles about Islam in West Africa, and general reviews of Islam or aspects of that religion in other books.[186]

In recent years, many western scholars of Islam have been accused of being orientalists. This chapter defines an orientalist and investigates whether Parrinder is to be counted among them. More briefly, it examines his attitude to Judaism and inquires whether he shows the attitudes of an orientalist in writing about that religion.

6.1 The nature of an orientalist.

The Oxford English Dictionary records that the first use of the word 'orientalist' was about 1780. It meant a student of the orient. 'Orientalism', the study of the east, dates back to 1812.

In more recent decades, particularly during the last twenty years, 'orientalism' and its other grammatical forms have

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[186]The most important of these will be referred to in the course of this chapter.

been used in an unfavourable sense, mainly of western scholars of Islam. They stand condemned of writing condescendingly about the orient, and of being involved as agents of imperialism to bring about its denigration and devise the destruction of many of its religions and cultures. So, for example, Abdallah Laroui defined 'orientalist' as 'a foreigner - this case a westerner -who takes Islam as the subject of his research', and continued:

> we find in the Orientalists' work an ideological (in the crudest sense of the word) critique of Islamic culture. The result of great intellectual effort is for the most part valueless... The caste of Orientalists constitutes part of the bureaucracy and, for this reason, suffers from limitations that badly inhibit the free creation of new approaches or even the application of those that already exist. (quoted in Watt, 1991:107)

The most scathing critique of orientalism in recent years has been that of Edward Said (b.1935), by birth a Palestinian Christian, now an American citizen and a secularist. In his influential book Orientalism (first published in 1978), he described and condemned the phenomenon in three long chapters: 'The Scope of Orientalism'; 'Orientalist Structures and Restructures'; and, 'Orientalism Now'. Said's basic point, passionately made, is that 'modern orientalism', from the eighteenth century onwards, has created a stereotype of the gullible, untruthful, illogical, misogynistic, sexually insatiable, cruel and untrustworthy 'oriental' male, and of the passive female. According to Said:

> the principal dogmas of Orientalism exist in their purest form today in studies of the Arabs and Islam. Let us recapitulate them here: one is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior. Another dogma is that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a "classical" Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically "objective". A fourth dogma is that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared (the Yellow peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation wherever possible). (Said, 1985:300f.)

In a series of later works, Said has extended and illustrated these basic points. His book, Covering Islam (1981), with its sub-title 'How The Media And The Experts[187] Determine How We See The Rest Of The World', emphasises that his chief concern is with the West's attitude to Islam.

Yet Said has an inadequate historical perspective on the relations between Islam and the West. William Montgomery Watt, 'one of the last living and best-known traditional orientalists' (Ahmed, 1992:181), has shrewdly observed that Said realises some of the important differences between nineteenth century stereotypes and earlier ones, but:

> there is one central question which he omits. How can it be that previous European perceptions of the Muslim as a warrior spreading his faith by violence and the sword was transformed into a perception of the

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[187]The word 'Experts' is used ironically.

> Oriental as a pusillanimous, weak and ineffectual person. It would surely be better to see the nineteenth century perception of the Oriental as something new which became possible after the western European powers had ceased to regard the Ottoman Empire as a military threat. (Watt, 1991:109)

If Said, a literary scholar, is no historian, neither is he adept in Religious Studies. He is ignorant of much that is central to Islam. One example is that Said condemns Sir Hamilton Gibb, whom he calls 'the greatest name in modern Anglo-American Islamic studies' (Said, 1985:53) for 'his assertion that the Islamic master science is law, which early on replaced theology'. In Said's view, this was an avowal 'made about Islam, not on the basis of evidence internal to Islam, but rather on the basis of a logic deliberately outside Islam' (Said, 1985:280). Yet Gibb was right. He was intent upon correcting impressions of European students who conformed Islam's central concerns to Christianity's (Watt, 1991:110; Gibb, 1969:7). Moreover, Said is also uninformed about the religion of his birth, especially the reasons for its troubled relations with Islam. For example, he condemns Dante (1265-1321) for putting, in his The Divine Comedy, Muslims (specifically, Avicenna, Averroës and Saladin) into the Inferno along with pre-Christian virtuous heathens: 'Even though the Koran specifies Jesus as a prophet, Dante chooses to consider the great Muslim philosophers and king as having been fundamentally ignorant of Christianity' (Said, 1985:69). Whatever Dante's motives, Said does not appear to understand that quranic definitions of prophecy hardly

align with Christian ones. Muslims who rely upon the Quran for their information about Jesus remain fundamentally ignorant of Christianity[188]; and an implication of Said's thesis is that interpreting others from one's own perspective is destructive and dehumanising. Moreover, Saladin (1138-1193) was not a philosopher, and to call him king is (ironically, given Said's thesis) rather a western designation to describe his authority as a Muslim political ruler.

In one of his most recent books, Culture and Imperialism (1993), Said's polemical skills are turned upon literary and musical figures. He protests too much. For example, in his dissection of Verdi's opera *Aida* as a 'hybrid, radically impure work that belongs equally to the history of culture and the historical experience of overseas domination' (Said, 1993:147), it is easy to lose sight of Verdi the humanist and freedom-fighter, as well as the paid entertainer. To be sure, *Aida* has an exotic location in ancient Egypt, but it explores issues of love, patriotism and parental manipulation that are universally relevant. To seek to establish it as an orientalist work is to miss the point. Ironically, Said misinterprets because he is obsessed by his own agenda, just as he believes orientalists to be consumed by theirs.

The former Pakistani diplomat, now Cambridge don, Akbar Ahmed, points out that:

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[188]See Chapter 6.4.

> However powerfully Said argues his case, the work of the older orientalists was marked by many positive features. These included a lifetime's scholarship, a majestic command of languages, a wide vision and breadth of learning and an association with the established universities. (Ahmed, 1992:180)

Akbar Ahmed is right to point out that 'Said's Arab passion may have ultimately damaged his own cause. The *rite de passage*, the ritual slaying of the elders..., has been too noisy and too bloody' (Ahmed, 1992:180).[189] Nevertheless, Said's polemics have served to remind his readers of the intricate and compromised relationships between the western world and Islam.[190] Unfortunately, they have also encouraged Muslims to dismiss as 'Orientalism' the critiques of aspects of Islam by westerners. Orientalists write as outsiders and from particular perspectives, but that does not mean that their views are necessarily unconstructive, and that they write nothing that Muslims could profit by reading.

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[189]Akbar Ahmed's book Postmodernism and Islam assumes that, in the wake of modernism's passing, it is possible for Islam and the west to engage fruitfully with each other. However, he fails to grapple with the issue of whether Islam, since it has never accepted modernism, can meaningfully be related to postmodernism. His solution, that Islam breathes 'the spirit of postmodernism', bypasses too adroitly issues of history and philosophy (Ahmed, 1992:50).

[190]Said's simplistic and inconsistent attitude towards 'orientalists' is clearly to be seen in his preface to the 1987 Penguin edition of Rudyard Kipling's Kim. He defends Kipling as a man of two cultures, possessing an Indian identity as well as a British one. Yet Kipling, though often an acute and empathetic observer of India, could be as imperialist as any western Islamic scholar of his day.

In his later works, Parrinder has written in ignorance of the debate about 'orientalism' or, at least, has disregarded it. His two chapters on Islam in Encountering World Religions do not mention it at all (Parrinder, 1987a:84-110), although by 1987 it had become an important issue between Muslims and Christians. Yet its major concerns interrogate his works on Islam. Does he give only a western and Christian perspective on Islam? Does he despise what he describes? We shall have these questions in mind as we examine his work on Islam. First, we shall start with his work on Islam in West Africa. Then we shall look at his writings about Islam in his thematic and other works. Thereafter, we shall examine Jesus in the Quran and ask whether he could fruitfully have examined another range of issues between Muslims and Christians.

6.2 Islam in Africa.

Parrinder's first encounter with Islam was in French West Africa, Dahomey and then Ivory Coast. It therefore makes little grammatical sense to call Parrinder an 'orientalist'. Because most western academics have engaged with Muslims either in the Middle East or South Asia, the term 'orientalist' has made a certain sense. But Parrinder's geographical setting as a missionary and then teacher in West Africa illustrates the term's parochialism, given that Islam and Christianity are worldwide religions.

In all the places in Africa where Parrinder lived, Islam was by far the dominant religion. Almost twenty years after

his earliest days there, he recalled that 'one sees the largest mosques at Porto Novo, where are important Muslim communities' (Parrinder, 1951b:7). Yet his earliest interests were Christianity and African primal faith. Significantly, in his reminiscences of 'Dahomey Half a Century Ago' (1989), he mentions Christianity and primal faith, but Islam not at all. His real interests lay elsewhere.

This is confirmed by his book Religion in Africa, published over a decade after he had left Africa (1969). Parrinder's main contribution was not in the section on Islam, but rather to establish primal faith as one of Africa's Three Religions (the title of the book when it was reprinted in 1976). Part 3 is about Islam, and has five chapters: 'Egypt and North Africa'; 'West Africa'; 'East Sudan and Eastern Africa'; 'Modern Times'; and, 'Religious Movements'. His is basically a historical account, and relies heavily upon others' works.

There are grounds for thinking that Islam lay at the periphery of his interest in religion whilst he was in Africa. He wrote a short article on 'Moslem Revival in Nigeria' (July 30th 1955), which admitted that 'the progress of Islam in Nigeria in the last 20 years is of great significance not only for students of religion, but also for those concerned with social and political affairs' (Parrinder, 1955:698). It briefly describes the impact of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders, but this material was

taken from the Revd J.S. Trimingham's book Islam in the Sudan, and was not his own work.

After Parrinder left Africa, he returned in several works to the theme of Islam in West Africa, most notably in 'Islam and West African Indigenous Religion' (December 1959). He has never adequately given positive reasons for Islam's success in gaining converts. Instead, he has explained away its influence. In particular, he argued that census figures in 1950 and 1953, which showed the dominance of Islam in Lagos and Ibadan respectively, are of doubtful accuracy (Parrinder, 1959:133). Moreover, he asserted that:

> In many parts Islam is stagnant[191] with the lethargy of ages, but it still dominates the scene and spreads naturally. In the disintegrating world of today Islam seems to many Africans to offer stability and community. (Parrinder, 1959:135)

Furthermore, he emphasised that when Islam encounters primal religion, it strengthens the belief in a supreme God, and harmonises with faith in 'magicians who dispense medicine' and with polygamy. This may be true, but it is clear that, at this point, Parrinder was writing not as a sociologist or phenomenologist but mainly as a disapproving Christian apologist: 'Men drift into this religion, often with no instruction or initiation' (Parrinder, 1959:136f.). He claimed that:

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[191]Many western, especially Christian writers, have referred to the stagnation of Islam. J.S. Trimingham, whose works Parrinder depended on, often used it. For example, Trimingham, 1962:141-154.

> it must be stressed that it is not the religion of Islam alone which has enabled it to profit by present-day conditions. Without the "opening-up" of Africa [by "Christian" powers] in the last century, West African Islam would undoubtedly have remained largely confined to the interior. (Parrinder, 1959:138)

Thus far, it would seem that Parrinder could be dismissed by Muslims and others as a Christian missionary who attempts to justify why Islam and not his own faith has gained the allegiance of many West Africans, rather than a scholar who examines the strengths and attractions of Islam. Yet, as we shall describe later in this chapter, he writes more perceptively and appreciatively about Islam elsewhere, so he has not simply been a polemicist.

It would seem, then, that Parrinder's experiences in West Africa had a twofold effect upon him. Firstly, he was far more interested in Christianity and primal faith than in Islam. Secondly, he filtered his information about Islam there through Christian missionary spectacles, which means that, in writing about African Islam, he reveals more about the (perceived) failure of the Churches than about Islam. Because of his commitment as a scholar to primal faith, and in matters of faith to Christianity, in a setting where Muslims were in a majority or at least a very important presence, his emphases seem awry, out of step with the facts. Parrinder's sketchy treatment of Islam in West Africa shows his weakness in writing about what interests him as though this can be divorced from its wider setting.

This defect had come to the fore in Religion in an African City (1953). Although this could plausibly be described as an early sociological survey, highlighting religious pluralism in black Africa's largest city, Ibadan, it is not really so. Rather, it is more a useful compendium of information which interested Parrinder and, in its description of various religious expressions, a forerunner of his later comparative thematic works which ranged over wider geographical areas.

Only one chapter is given over to Islam. It is in nine sections. Parrinder gives a brief history, recording that, according to local tradition, Islam was introduced into Ibadan early in the nineteenth century. The thirteen chief imams of the city (until 1951, when the book was written) were all foreigners by origin, though the seventh and later ones have been native to the town. Parrinder discusses the instruction of faithful Muslims, describes the mosques and Friday prayers. In a sixth section, he finds only one example in Southern Nigeria (and that forty miles from Ibadan) of the phenomenon of saint-worship that he had recently read of in J.S. Trimingham's 'outstanding book, *Islam in the Sudan*' (Parrinder, 1953:71). He briefly mentions certain social customs, such as marriage ceremonies and begging, and then has a section on orthodox Islam and the sects. Then he describes a Muslim diviner, and finally assesses the advance of Islam.

His section about 'Advancing Islam' suggests reasons for the strength of Islam in Ibadan which, as we have seen, he picked up in his later article 'Islam and West African Indigenous Religion' and applied to West Africa as a whole. Earlier in his book, he had lamented 'the almost complete absence of reliable details of population' (Parrinder, 1953:3). Here, he admits that:

> it may be right to count nearly half the inhabitants of the town as occasional participants in Muslim festivities. But the 80 per cent. claimed by enthusiastic supporters is too much exaggerated. (Parrinder, 1953:84)

He gives three reasons for the progress of Islam in Yorubaland. First, it is not too exacting, permitting polygamy and superstitions. Moreover, chiefs find prestige accrues to them when they become Muslims, and their subjects follow suit. Second, the social side of Islam appeals, with its dancing and drumming, and a leadership who have other occupations and so are not a financial liability on the community. Third, 'Islam gives the appearance of unity and universality' (Parrinder, 1953:84).

Behind the grudging accolades is Parrinder's recognition that Islam was growing not just in Ibadan but in Nigeria as a whole. This point is implied in the title of the chapter, 'The Rising Crescent: Islam', and reiterated more explicitly in the last chapter where, however, he seems uncertain whether Islam or Christianity will come to dominate in Nigeria (Parrinder, 1953:187-189). Earlier, however, he had indicated that 'Islam is the most

considerable factor today in the religious life of Ibadan' (Parrinder, 1953:63)

Yet the form of the book belies that statement. It consists of ten chapters. Two are about primal religion. One is on the missionary churches and another on the 'separatist sects'. There is one on church worship. Chapters on personal religion and religion and morality concentrate on Christianity. There is a chapter on secret societies, and another on currents of religion.

What is extraordinary is the small amount of space given to Islam in Religion in an African City, one chapter and a few pages towards the end of the book. Thus, just over 20 pages (63-85, and 187-189) of the book's 211 pages discuss Islam in any depth. Moreover, in the chapter given over to it, little of the information except for a page of history[192] refers specifically to Islam in Ibadan. Much of the material elsewhere in the chapter could easily describe the religion in the rest of Yorubaland or indeed in West Africa as a whole. Much more information is given about Christianity, even though it was of less importance to the religious life of the city.

Parrinder could be accused, not only of denigrating Islam by according it little space in his book but also of imputing to it unworthy practices: for example, he writes

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[192]Half way down page 64 to the end of the first paragraph on page 65.

that 'since one of the principal duties of Islam is to give alms, begging is encouraged'[193] (Parrinder, 1953:75).

Rosalind Hackett correctly observes that:

> the structure of the book is not conducive to an awareness of the religious history and developments of the city, nor are we able to obtain an idea of the interaction and interdependence between the various institutions and traditions or the way in which individual worshippers function within a religiously pluralistic environment. (Hackett, 1989:7)

Parrinder's best work has been based on personal interest and research. He had a scholarly interest in primal faith, and a personal one in Christianity. Islam was outside the centre of his curiosity and expertise, and this is reflected in the position he accords it in Religion in an African City. During Parrinder's Ibadan days, his contacts with Muslims were fewer than with Christians and the adherents of primal faith, or even the heterodox Ahmadiyya community. He met the chief imam of the city, Muilli Ayinder Basannu, and attended some mosque prayers, but that was the extent of his involvement with Muslims. He wrote that 'all the temples and churches mentioned [in the book] were visited by me personally, but not all the mosques'. No doubt some of his five part-time African assistants visited these (Parrinder, 1953:5).

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[193]Parrinder elaborates: 'One meets all manner of blind and lame people, Muslims, going round the street begging, "Give me alms for the sake of the prophet"'. But he does not reveal how almsgiving, one of the five 'pillars' of the religion, was arranged in Ibadan; perhaps he did not know. The collection of alms varies in different parts of the Islamic world, but is rarely left to the individual's casual act of goodness.

In Religion in an African City, Parrinder displays an inductive approach to Religious Studies, describing what he sees and knows and finds of interest, rather than attempting to stand outside his missiological and other interests and place the city as a whole and not his particular perceptions of it at the centre of his research. This inductive approach has considerable drawbacks. One fundamental weakness is that the book's title is misleading, since it describes aspects of religion in Ibadan and elsewhere in South-West Nigeria, which do not have an obvious focus or point of departure except for the author's interest in them.

Another defect, deriving from this idiosyncratic approach, is precisely the weight he gives to Islam's importance in Ibadan, far less than it deserves. He accords it too little space and considered reflection.

One of the most tantalising aspects of Parrinder's discussion of Islam is his treatment of 'tombs and saints'. He describes the belief among Nigerian Muslims that 'the departed one is near to the tomb in which he was buried, or can come to it on occasions as well as being in paradise', and wonders whether 'the cult of ancestors will develop into saint-worship' (Parrinder, 1953:79). In his later article, 'Islam and West African Indigenous Religion', he writes that:

> The animist... has affected Islam as well as being affected by it. Spiritist and magical practices have flourished in the midst of Islam. *Baba of Karo* is a

revealing story of a Muslim Hausa woman who still believes in the spirits "who know everything," "they are here in the compound, they are here in the town," "everyone has his own." In the *bori* cult of spirit possession each spirit has its name, receives appropriate sacrifice, and is believed to control sickness. It is significant that "the custodians of the cult among the Muslims are the prostitutes, a class of women who deviate from the correct Muslim patterns of behaviour, but cannot be effectively controlled or eliminated from the body of the faithful." (Parrinder, 1959:140; Smith, 1954:208f., 219, 261)

From a later standpoint, Parrinder's description of West African Islam lacks two things. First, it fails to integrate his observations about Islam's 'orthodox' beliefs and practices, and their reconstruction in the lives of West Africans. Such a base could be sociological, or else global in the way in which Rosalind Hackett has suggested.[194] As it is, his theological perspective is a valid though limited tool for understanding the processes of religious change in the pluralistic society of relatively modern West Africa. Secondly, it is significant that his commitment to the comparative method has not led him to compare the interaction of South Asian Islam with Hinduism, with that of West African Islam's mingling with primal faith. The prevalence of the personal veneration of Muhammad, devotion to *pirs* (religious guides), and the use of *tawiz* (amulets and charms) in South Asia, offers the possibility of suggestive parallels with Islam in other places where Muslims make significant contacts with people of other faiths. However, Parrinder has not been interested enough

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[194]See Chapter 5.2.

in Islam to note these parallels. Nor has he attempted to discuss Islam phenomenologically in any detailed way anywhere outside West Africa. In Worship in the World's Religions, he discusses 'relics and saints' of South Asian Islam on two pages, but in too little detail, and he makes no comparisons with the African situation (Parrinder, 1974a:201f.).

6.3 Islam outside Africa.

However, Parrinder has written on Islam in non-contextual senses. In this section, we shall examine three areas in order to demonstrate his shortcomings as an Islamicist. First, we shall discuss some of his statements about Islam which reveal him not so much as guilty of factual inaccuracy as of failing to empathise with the religion. Second, we shall scrutinise two of his bibliographies, to serve as examples of others he wrote. Finally, we shall look at his work on Islamic mysticism.

In a number of places, Parrinder gives the impression that Islam is not a religion he can identify with, beyond a certain book-knowledge. In discussing Wilfred Smith's suggestion that 'the Quran holds the place in Islam that Christ, and not the Bible, holds in Christianity', Parrinder offers the comment that 'I believe that this statement needs some qualification since the Quran is not an object of devotion, and certainly not of prayer, in the way that Christ is for Christian worship' (Parrinder,

1971b:102). Yet ten years earlier, he himself had written that:

> The Quran receives the highest veneration from all Muslims, to whatever sect they belong. No one must read it or touch it without washing himself ritually as for worship. (Parrinder, 1974a:190; first published in 1961)

In a sense, therefore, it is an object of devotion, and Smith, who spent his formative years in Lahore at the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies, was pointing to something he felt experientially, but Parrinder did not.

Towards the end of his inaugural lecture as Professor in King's College, London, he refers to William Montgomery Watt's cautiously affirmatory acknowledgment of Muhammad as a prophet, at the end of his textbook Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman (Watt, 1961:240). Parrinder rightly observes that all Watt permitted himself at that point was a 'welling up' of the 'creative imagination' in Muhammad, and a statement that 'by God's grace' he had provided millions of people with a superior religion (Parrinder, 1972c:25; cf Sharpe and Hinnells, 1973:201). Parrinder did not, however, note that this was a significant departure from Watt's major work Muhammad at Medina (1956), of which the second half of Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman was an abridgement; the section in the earlier book assessing Muhammad's greatness had not raised the matter of whether he was a prophet (Watt, 1956:321-35). Nor did Parrinder point out that, whatever the caution of Watt's discussion, the title of Watt's later book actually calls Muhammad, Prophet.

Some of the words Parrinder uses in his writings about Islam serve to interpret it through Christian spectacles. For example, he uses the word 'saints' of dead Muslim spiritual leaders (e.g. Parrinder, 1953:71; Parrinder, 1974a:201), whether in Africa or Asia. He does not appear to know that some of these 'saints', more properly 'spiritual leaders', may be alive, living guides. Perhaps an imprudent desire to compare their veneration with ancestor worship misled him. In Religion in an African City, he wrote that 'whether the cult of ancestors will develop into saint-worship cannot yet be predicted' (Parrinder, 1953:73). More importantly, the word saint is arguably inappropriate and misleading, as Julian Baldick has pointed out:

> There is no process of canonization in Islam, nor any authority capable of conducting it. A vast number of terms have been mistranslated as 'saint', terms which mean 'elder', 'guide', 'noble', etc. The expression most often rendered as 'saint', *wali Allah*, means 'friend of God'. The idea of the friend, the protégé or 'client' of God, who is also the protector and patron of lesser Muslims, is so essential a feature of Islam that one loses all sense of perspective if one confuses it with the Christian concept of sainthood, with its connotations of heroic piety and officially endorsed innocence. (Baldick, 1989:8)

Actually, used in the Pauline sense of 'holy' or 'separated one' there may be more in the word 'saint' worthy of comparison with Muslim figures than Baldick admits or knows. However, Parrinder does not define his term; it therefore misleads at least as much as it enlightens.

This sense of Parrinder's insecure grasp of Islamic meanings from within the tradition is confirmed by an observation of his bibliographies on the religion. That offered at the end of his chapter on Islam in his An Introduction to Asian Religions (1957) lists nine books (Parrinder, 1957:30). None is by a Muslim. He could, for example, have recommended Syed Ameer Ali's The Spirit of Islam, a work by an Indian modernist which has rarely been out of print since it was revised and published in 1922.[195] To be sure, Parrinder's book is for western readers (though so was Ameer Ali's). Nevertheless, the section on Indian Religion lists three Hindu writers and one Sikh among the sixteen books (Parrinder, 1957:61).

Much later, he offered a 'Bibliography' to his short article 'Islamic Doctrine' (January 1972). Of the ten general introductions he recommends, only one is by a Muslim, Fazlur Rahman's Islam.[196] He notes that Hamilton Gibb's Muhammadanism (sic for Mohammedanism; though Parrinder is right to favour this spelling for the Prophet's name) is preferred by some teachers 'despite its name'. He does not appear to realise that this title was disliked by Gibb,[197] but enforced by his publishers. Alfred

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[195]He includes this work in a later bibliography discussed shortly hereafter, Parrinder, 1972b:25.

[196]University of Chicago Press, 1966.

[197]'Modern Muslims dislike the terms Mohammed and Mohammedanism, which seem to them to carry the implication of the worship of Mohammed', Gibb, 1969:1; cf. Watt, 1991:110.

Guillaume's book, Islam, which Parrinder describes as 'the most popular introduction' is a much more polemical work than Gibb's,[198] though Parrinder makes no comment about this (Parrinder, 1972b:23).

Parrinder suggests books under seven other headings: 'Muhammad'; 'The Koran'; 'General History'; 'Islamic Thought'; 'Devotion and Mysticism'; 'Modern Times'; and, 'Reference'. The headings are apposite, and the choice of books, given that he wrote more than twenty years ago, are good ones. However, they are dominated by non-Muslim writers in every section. This may have been unavoidable given what was then available in English; certainly, the books recommended in most British university courses on Islam then would have corresponded in large measure to his choice. He had read widely in a religion which was not really his speciality, enough to teach it and to know what was being used elsewhere. But his reading was largely at second-hand, through the eyes of non-Muslims. Though this was true of his work on primal faith, too, and on India, he had few or no personal relationships with Muslims on which to draw knowledge that books alone cannot give. He tended to pass on accepted judgements which are, to say the least, of doubtful validity. For example, he wrote that the 'best of the cheaper translations' of the Quran is that by A.J.

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[198]For example, note his patronising and disingenuous words (he wrote as a convinced Christian): 'I have myself claimed to be a Muslim in the proper sense of the word, in accordance with sura 28:53, which states that the people of the scriptures say: "Verily before it [i.e. the Quran] we were self-surrenderers" (Muslims)...', Guillaume, 1954:63.

Arberry, The Koran Interpreted. Many have praised its virtues, which are, however, well hidden. It has no notes and refers only to every fifth verse, baffling to the student. Moreover, in striving to convey 'the intricate and richly varied rhymes' of the original (Arberry, 1964:x), it achieves obscurity of meaning.

In many ways, Parrinder's chapter on 'Muhammad and the Sufis' in his Mysticism in the World's Religions is a model of sympathetic and careful scholarship, based on western writers such as Kenneth Cragg, William Montgomery Watt and Reynold Nicholson. It attempts to show how mystical Islam is grounded in the experiences of Muhammad. To that end, it demolishes the Christian maligning of Muhammad as a lecher, noting that 'the Prophet's record [with treating his wives] was much better than that head of the Church of England, Henry VIII' (Parrinder, 1974a:121). Parrinder weighs the evidence about Muhammad's status as a mystic judiciously, concluding that the supposed night journey to Jerusalem and thence to the seventh heaven is not the plain meaning of the Quran, 'so it would be unwise to read a mystical meaning into this verse [17.1] alone' (Parrinder, 1974a:123). He is more persuaded by the verses which suggest that Muhammad's revelations came when he was enmantled [73;1-3; 74:1-4]; a mantle might be a symbol of prophetic authority (Parrinder, 1974a:124). He concludes his discussion by noting that:

> The essential non-existence of everything except God was later developed by theologians into an

> absoluteness that was extreme Deism. The Sufi mystics, on the contrary, took the other road of finding that nothing existed but God, and for some of them the world became merged into God, since he was the All, and they arrived at a virtual pantheism or monism. Muhammad held neither of these views, but the richness and variety of his teaching allowed for their development. (Parrinder, 1974a:128)

In his description of Sufism, Parrinder is more interested in selected figures of the early period up to the 12th century CE, rather than the later orders, which he describes in less than a page (Parrinder, 1974a:139f.).[199] It is significant that the scholars upon whose work he draws are almost all western. Indeed, of the authors mentioned in 22 footnotes in the section on 'Sufism', only 2 are Muslim, though some other references are to translations of Muslim works by western scholars. A result of this is that he discusses figures who, though fascinating to Christians, have been held in suspicion by or are simply marginal to many Muslims: for example, al-Hallaj (d.922), who was killed for speaking of his relationship to God in terms that could be interpreted to mean identity. Hallaj had been the subject of a study by Louis Massignon (1883-1962), a French Roman Catholic who rediscovered his Christian faith through a study of Sufism. Parrinder, as with many others, is indebted to Massignon for interpreting Sufism as an integral part of the Quran and Islam (Parrinder, 1954a:128f.).

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[199]He noted elsewhere that 'western writers have often concentrated upon individual Sufis, but J.S. Trimingham (in *The Sufi Orders in Islam* 1971) emphasizes the organizational aspect of these orders, their practical discipline and ritual performances': Parrinder, 1983b:364.

But was Massignon right to view Sufism in this way? In a recent introduction to Sufism (1989), Julian Baldick argues that it grew out of eastern Christianity, not the Quran. In the course of discussing the material, he questions many assumptions of modern Christian writers. There were probably additional political reasons for al-Hallaj's execution, and the words he is supposed to have uttered and died for, *ana 'l-haqq*, ('I am the Truth') may have been, *ara 'l-haqq*, ('I see the Truth'). Baldick comments that 'there is no firm evidence that Hallaj ever uttered the expression for which he is most notorious' (Baldick, 1989:48). Although Parrinder noted that al-Ghazali (1058-1111) is a controversial figure in Islam, he would be surprised to find him 'dismissed here [in Baldick's book] as an inconsistent popularizer and relegated to a station beneath his Sufi brother' (Baldick, 1989:10, 65-67). Indeed, Baldick overstates his case. His book seems determinedly provocative, although it is often well argued. It is, moreover, a useful reminder that he and a number of younger western Islamicists are researching into Islam, bound neither by criteria of Islamic orthodoxy nor by the imperial and Christian connections of many orientalists.

Parrinder, who is not an Islamicist, has not kept abreast with recent study in this area, as his two chapters on Islam in Encountering World Religions (1987) illustrate. One is on the 'Prophet of Islam', and offers a short assessment of Muhammad by Muslims, and by Christians such

as Constance Padwick and Kenneth Cragg. The other is on 'Koran and Bible', and looks especially at the person of Jesus. This last issue in particular implies a Christian interpretation of Islam. In Parrinder's work, such a depiction is illustrated chiefly by his book, Jesus in the Quran, to which we now turn.

6.4 Jesus in the Quran.

In Ibadan, Parrinder had some contact with the Ahmadiyya, a heterodox Islamic group founded in north India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (c.1836-1908). Ghulam Ahmad had declared that Jesus had not died on the cross but was rescued by his disciples and went to Kashmir. He died and was buried there. Ghulam Ahmad proclaimed that he himself was the spirit and power of Jesus. The Ahmadiyya accept him as messiah and *mahdi* ('the one who is rightly guided'), contrary to the orthodox Islamic view that Jesus is the messiah and Muhammad the last and greatest of the prophets. Writing in 1959 about their presence in Nigeria as a whole, Parrinder observed that the Ahmadiyya:

> have become exceedingly active in literature, education and propaganda, claiming converts among Christians as well as among animists... In Lagos they print literature and journals, and a weekly column every Friday in the chief English newspaper (the "Daily Times," with a daily circulation of over 80,000), is written by the chief Imam of the Ahmadiyya, and often contains anti-Christian propaganda, intended for literates. (Parrinder, 1959:137)

Parrinder was aware that the Ahmadiyya was not a large group. In Religion in an African City, he wrote that they

had only a small mosque which could not hold more than 100 people (Parrinder, 1953:77). Many years later in 1971, he estimated that there were only about 30,000 in West Africa as a whole (Parrinder, 1971e:69). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suppose that his interest in Jesus as the Quran presents him dates from his awareness of Ahmadiyya propaganda. Their agenda, that Jesus did not die, is one that he deals with and attempts to refute on the basis of quranic teaching.

Once again, therefore, we meet Parrinder the Christian missiologist and theologian, in this instance intent upon righting false information as well as mistaken perceptions about the founder of Christianity. He wrote that 'the interest of this book is chiefly theological' (Parrinder, 1976b:10). Thus, his major readership was western Christians, but he recognised that by the time he wrote (the book was first published in 1965), authors could hope for 'a world audience'. For this reason, he adopted Watt's device of avoiding the question of the authorship of the Quran, by writing 'the Quran says' rather than 'God says' or 'Muhammad says' (Parrinder, 1976b:10; Watt, 1953:x).

Parrinder seems to have had two aims in writing the book. The first was irenical, making positive comparisons and links between Islam and Christianity. He wrote that:

> There are differences between the Muslim and Christian apprehensions of God, but it would be fatal to any chance of understanding to doubt that one and the same God is the reality in both. (Parrinder, 1976b:13)

His second aim in writing, as the above quotation makes clear, was to aid understanding. He chose a particularly difficult topic, the long-standing, complex and destructive problem between Christians and Muslims of the person and works of Jesus Christ. Parrinder wrote that 'it is to encourage study, self-examination, dialogue and searching the scriptures that this book has been written' Parrinder, 1976b:173).

The book is a thorough account of the quranic material about Jesus. Every reference there to him, his titles, and people associated with him are described. The book has 17 chapters. The introduction is followed by three chapters on the names of Jesus: 'Jesus' and 'Son of 'Mary' have a chapter each; and a third looks at other titles ascribed to him in the Quran. There are two chapters on 'Zachariah and John' and 'Mary'. There is one on 'The Annunciation' and another on 'The Birth of Jesus'. A chapter follows on 'Works of Jesus' and another on 'Words of Jesus'. Then there is one on 'The Death of Jesus' and another on 'Jesus and the Future'. The title 'Son of God' has a chapter, then there is another on 'Trinity'. There is one on 'Gospel' and another on 'Christians'. Then there is a 'Conclusion' followed by a 'General Index', 'Quranic Index' and 'Biblical Index'.

Jesus in the Quran has proved an invaluable resource, so much so that it is to be reprinted by a third publisher in

May 1995.[200] In order to illustrate both the measure of his achievement, and also to prepare the ground for some criticisms of the assumptions which lie behind his work, we shall examine his account of the death of Jesus (Parrinder, 1976b:105-121). This has been a particularly important area of dispute between orthodox Muslims, the Ahmadiyya and Christians.

Many Muslims believe that Jesus did not die, but was taken up by God and will return as a sign of the last day. However, Parrinder argued that the weight of the Quran, as opposed to many interpretations of it, is in favour of a real death. For example, the Meccan sura 19:34/33[201]:, 'Peace is upon me [Jesus], the day of my birth and the day of my death', indicates that Jesus died and that his raising up is at the general resurrection of all people when the world ends. Jesus's return to God is mentioned in suras 3:48/55 and 5:117, which most naturally refer to his death. Parrinder pointed out that the Arabic word *mutawaffika*, used in these passages of Jesus, is used of people dying in sura 2:241/240, and, in sura 6:60, of believers being called to God in the night, raised up to complete a stated term and returning to him.

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[200]Faber and Faber published it in 1965, then Sheldon Press in 1976. Oneworld will publish it in May 1995. It has never been revised since it was first written.

[201]Parrinder refers to two schemes for versifying the Quran. The first is that of Gustav Fluegel (1834), and the second the Cairo edition of 1923. The former is not acceptable to Muslims, but the latter is used widely among them.

The most contentious passage between Muslims and Christians about Jesus is sura 4:156/157, which most Muslims see as a denial of the crucifixion. This in turn has led them to interpret 3:48/55 against its natural sense, to mean that Jesus did not die. Sura 4:156/157 comes in a section (4:154-157/155-159) which he quotes in full:

> So for their [the Jews'] violating their compact, and for their unbelief in the signs of God, their killing the prophets without justification, and for their unbelief, and their speaking against Mary a mighty slander; and for their saying: 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus the Son of Mary, the messenger of God', though they did not kill him, and did not crucify him, but he was counterfeited for them; verily those who have gone in different ways in regard to him are in doubt about him; they have no (revealed) knowledge of him and only follow opinion; though they did not certainly kill him. Nay, God raised him to himself. God is sublime, wise. And there is no People of the Book but will surely believe in him before his death, and on the day of resurrection, he will be regarding them a witness.[202]

Parrinder pointed out that the most widely held view among Muslims about this passage is that the Jews tried to kill Jesus but were unable to do so. This led him to examine two questions: did Jesus really die on the cross?; was there a substitute who suffered in his place? The canonical gospels affirm the first and have no suggestion of the second. Many Muslims, however, deny the first and affirm the second; they have slender support, so Parrinder contended, in the teaching of the 2nd century CE Egyptian gnostic and Christian Basilides, whose views only survive in rather

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[202]Parrinder usually used Richard Bell's two volume translation of the Quran. It was first published by T & T Clark, Edinburgh in 1937.

diverse interpretations by his opponents. The idea of a substitute, perhaps Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene, has been accepted by some notable Muslim commentators of the Quran. For example, Tabari (d.923) believed a Jewish chief called Joshua, whom God gave the form and appearance of Jesus, died in his place.[203] However, the passage hardly demands this interpretation, which does not seem its obvious import. The Arabic *shubbiha la-hum*, (which is even more difficult to translate than Parrinder suggested) is rendered by Bell into English as 'he [Jesus] was counterfeited for them'. Louis Massignon offered 'it [the crucifixion] appeared to them as such', a translation which Parrinder preferred. It is certainly possible that the Arabic words mentioned should be attached to the crucifixion and not Jesus. Then the meaning of a very difficult passage could be that the Jews did not kill Jesus rather than that he did not die.

It remains, however, a controversial and widely-interpreted passage. The Indian modernist, Sir Saiyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98), believed that after three or four hours Jesus was taken down from the cross by the disciples and kept in a secret place, for fear of the Jews. Parrinder noted that this led to the Ahmadiyya view that Jesus eventually went to Kashmir and died there. Another view has been expressed by the Egyptian surgeon and educationalist, Kamel Hussein. In his book Qaryah Zalimah, translated by Kenneth Cragg as

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[203]Perhaps Tabari was unaware that Joshua and Jesus are variant forms of the same name in Hebrew.

City of Wrong, he focused on the events leading to Good Friday. This is a sensitive and moving account of the influence of Jesus upon a number of the participants involved in his arrest and condemnation, whether they be (to use the titles of three sections of the book) 'In Jewry', 'With the Disciples', or 'Among the Romans'. Yet in the final section, 'Golgotha and After', the author (naturally, since he was a Muslim) reaffirmed the traditional Islamic belief that Jesus was not crucified. One of his characters, the Wise Man, observes:

> There is one thing about the events of this day of which I am aware which you do not know. It is that God has raised the Lord Christ to Himself. He was the light of God upon the earth. The people of Jerusalem would have nothing to do with him except to extinguish the light. Whereupon God has darkened the world around them. This darkness is a sign from God to show that God has forbidden them the light of faith and the guidance of conscience. (Hussein, 1959:183)

The author informed his translator that:

> No cultured Muslim believes... nowadays [that someone substituted for Jesus on the cross]. The text is taken to mean that the Jews thought they killed Christ but God raised him unto Him in a way we can leave unexplained among the several mysteries which we have taken for granted on faith alone. (Hussein, 1959:222)

Parrinder observed that 'the significance of the cross Dr Hussein sees to be in that men did crucify Jesus in intention, all their actions were bent towards it, and they utterly rejected the Christ of God' (Parrinder, 1976b:114).

Parrinder had held:

> long discussions with Dr Kamel Hussein... who took time off from a busy medical life to talk about problems of deep religious importance. The assurance that this book could be useful, and was not offensive to modern Muslims, encouraged the writer in final revisions and publication of a matter that had long been on his mind. (Parrinder, 1976b:14)

The book may not be offensive but, for all its usefulness as a reference work, it perpetuates the mistaken apprehension that Christian relations with Muslims can be built upon the shared figure of Jesus.

In Jesus in the Quran, Parrinder noted some important facts about the quranic views of Jesus, which show his importance to Muslims:

> The Quran gives a greater number of honourable titles to Jesus than to any other figure of the past... Three chapters or suras of the Quran are named after references to Jesus (3, 5 and 19); he is mentioned in fifteen suras and ninety-three verses. (Parrinder, 1976b:16)

However, this evidence could be looked at from a different perspective. In particular, over 6,000 verses of the Quran do not mention Jesus. A comparatively unimportant figure, Aiyub or Job, is mentioned in over 200 verses. Certainly, Jesus is greatly honoured, but Ibrahim (Abraham) and Musa (Moses) are more important quranic figures. Indeed, if all references to Jesus were deleted from the Quran, the religion of Islam would not be significantly different from how it has developed, save in some of its mystical forms.

In fact, Jesus fits into quranic categories of what constitutes a prophet, as Islam interprets that concept. In

the two religions, Jesus is a common figure, differently understood. Parrinder's comparative methodology has led him to accept too easily the notion that to examine the quranic material about Jesus from a Christian perspective might be, not just inoffensive to Muslims, but even lead to more positive relations between them and Christians:

> To Christians and to Muslims, to historians and to general readers, this book offers a new study of what the Quran says concerning Jesus, together with similar sayings from the Gospel. It is hoped that this account of a matter of great common concern, by going back to the fundamental scriptures, will help to remove some misunderstandings and lead towards deeper appreciation of Muslim and Christian faith. (Parrinder, 1976b:15)

A particular implication of Parrinder's work is that an informed exegesis of the Quran will reform Muslim belief. This aspiration is shared by some Muslim modernists, but has not so far been realised. If it were to be, it would require the corpus of traditions about the prophet (the *hadith*) to be radically reappraised, because much of the information about, for example, Jesus's death being an appearance rather than an actuality is found in them. Since these traditions are granted by Muslims a revelatory status second only to the Quran, such a reappraisal would have to be large scale, and probably at least as convulsive for Muslims as modern biblical criticism has been for Christians.[204] It is arguably improper for an outsider to be

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[204]From early in Islamic history, there has been a science of *hadith* criticism, though its methodology (which stresses the integrity of persons who form the chain of transmission, rather than the context and content of the saying) seems unreliable to western and even to some Muslim scholars. In the nineteenth century, the Indian modernist

a catalyst for such change, even one with the noblest of intentions. If Parrinder's suggested alternatives to traditional Muslim views, not only about the death of Jesus but in other areas of quranic christology are convincing, then the meaning of the Quran has been astonishingly opaque to Muslim people of faith who have studied it with the seriousness of those who believe it to be the exact word of God.

Elsewhere, Parrinder condemned that belief. In Avatar and Incarnation, he wrote that 'Christianity is not just tied to a book as 'word' of God, with all the dangers of fundamentalism which that entails, and which Islam must face sooner or later' (Parrinder, 1970a:265). Why must it? Assuming that recent western intellectual pilgrimages must be inevitably charted by others may be a demonstration of the orientalist mindset. Certainly, Islam shows few signs of conforming to what Parrinder believes appropriate for a modern or perhaps postmodern religion.

In short, Muslims and Christians disagree so widely about Jesus that it is difficult to believe that greater appreciation can come by a textual analysis of the Quran. Muslims are committed to a belief that God is the author of

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Saiyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) applied western critical methods to the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad and deduced that very few were authentic (Troll, 1978:138-144). In contemporary times, the Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi (b.1940) has particularly criticised as unauthentic most of the misogynistic *hadith* (Mernissi, 1991:25-81).

the Quran.[205] This means that they take for granted the fact that the information in it about Jesus is true. Most Christians believe, on historical, dogmatic or other grounds, that it is largely inaccurate as a statement not just about what they believe, but also about whatever information can be uncovered on the historical Jesus.

Thus, on quranic as well as other grounds, Jesus is the focal point of division between the two religions. Christian and Muslim perceptions about him are so different, as are the means of creating those perceptions, that it is difficult to believe that he could ever be other than a divisive figure. This is perhaps harder for Christians to accept than Muslims, because Jesus is central to their faith, and is seen in their scriptures as a decisive and unifying figure for all creation (eg Ephesians 1, Hebrews 1), whereas, dogmatically and legally, he is of no importance to the centre of Muslim faith. It might be particularly difficult for an ex-missionary like Parrinder to accept the irrelevance of Jesus; the more so when he is committed to the comparative method as leading to appreciation even where there is disagreement. Yet in the case of Jesus, comparing Muslim and Christian beliefs usually creates heat, not light.

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[205]As far as I am aware, only one Muslim writer, Syed Ameer Ali, has written that Muhammad is the author of the Quran. He believed it to be quintessentially Muhammad's moral teaching, but was a poor scholar of both Islam and Arabic (Ali, 1922:159-187).

That Jesus remains a divisive figure between Christians and Muslims can be illustrated from a relatively recent book review of Neal Robinson's Christ in Islam and Christianity. One of its reviewers, Ataullah Siddiqui, is clearly angered by it:

> Although it is useful to have a glimpse into the classical Islamic literature on the subject... [Robinson] does not take the quranic Jesus, and for that matter the Quran itself, as the authentic expression of Jesus in its own right. He finds many influences, from many quarters, on the Quran and therefore on the quranic Jesus,... which prevents the quranic expression of Jesus being expressed freely. (Siddiqui, 1992:170f.)

Robinson, not being a Muslim, is not bound to the historically inaccurate hypothesis that the Quran offers 'the authentic expression of Jesus in its own right'. Siddiqui misses this point. He is also oblivious of the offence Muslims can cause Christians by their appropriation and reappraisal of Jesus on grounds that seem wholly unconvincing.

Parrinder could perhaps have chosen a better bridgehead for establishing good relations between members of the two religions by exploring Jesus within the mystical traditions of both. He mentioned that 'Jesus was taken as the pattern of poverty and the ascetic life' for many Sufis (Parrinder, 1976b:165),[206] but Sufism is mentioned on only four pages of Jesus in the Quran (88, 164f., and 169). Parrinder is

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[206]In a later article on Sufism, he wrote that 'Jesus was often taken as a pattern of mystical life and his poverty was emphasized, with his purity giving him the title "seal of the saints"' (Parrinder, 1983b:365).

ambivalent about Sufis, arguing elsewhere that 'many wandered in the deserts of monism' (Parrinder, 1970a:278), a terrible fate in his estimation.

Instead of exploring Sufism, he could have offered a more innovative and imaginative look at the quranic material than he attempts. For example, the crucial passage on the crucifixion berates the Jews for disbelieving in the signs (*ayat*) of God. The concept of signs is important in the Quran: it describes itself as 'a book whose *ayat* have been made distinct' (41:3/2). It would be possible for Muslims and Christians together to explore the focus and meaning of these signs and eventually for Christians to explain that Jesus is for them God's clearest sign of his presence in the world. This would not dissolve the disagreements between Muslims and Christians but it might set the debate within a more fruitful and creative setting than has hitherto been attempted by many scholars.

Otherwise, Parrinder could have proceeded theologically by reflecting on specific implications of the *logos* Christology for Christian-Muslim relationships, not least because this estimation of Jesus's importance has meant so

much to him;[207] but of course he was not writing a theological book. Indeed he wrote that:

> Although the interest of this book is religious and theological, it makes no claim to be either speculative or dogmatic theology. It has been said that the present time is for ploughing, not reaping, for making soundings,[208] not plotting maps. Yet if the time is not ripe for major works of theological construction or reconstruction, the tools for the work need to be provided. (Parrinder, 1976b:14)

The book he wrote is a remarkable achievement. As so often when reading Parrinder, one marvels at the breadth of reading, interpreted clearly and helpfully for the non-specialist. Moreover, he certainly achieves his aim of providing non-Muslims and even Muslims uncertain of the details of their faith with the necessary tools for locating the Quran's material about Jesus.

Yet, in relation to Islam, the feeling remains that Parrinder's wide reading not only for Jesus in the Quran but also displayed in his other works on Islam, has not been matched by a depth of personal acquaintance with

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[207]Parrinder does indeed refer to the *logos* in 1976b:47f. (the section of Jesus as the Word or *kalima*), where he briefly describes the history of its origins in Hebrew thought, and comments that: 'A revival of the use of the Logos-doctrine has been suggested today, as a means of approach to people in other lands to whom the Word of God has clearly been spoken'. Yet there he leaves matters, at the point where the reader wants him to elaborate.

[208]This was the title of 'the much discussed symposium..., written by a group of Cambridge theologians... in 1962', Hastings, 1986:538. The essays reflected the liberal questionings of the time that were famously expressed in John Robinson's Honest to God, which was published in the following year. See further, Chapter 7.2.

Muslims themselves; in Africa, he preferred to study various forms of Christianity and primal faiths, and meet their adherents. Nor has his scholarship been met with a corresponding insight into the heart, still less the subtleties of the religion: he often displays sympathy, hardly ever empathy.

6.5 Parrinder and Judaism.

It could be claimed that Christian 'orientalism' has been extended as often to Jews as to Christians. Jews, like Muslims if not more so, have been caricatured, de-humanised, and destroyed metaphorically and often actually. Yet this deduction has not been made, probably because the major contemporary chronicler of orientalism, Edward Said, is a Palestinian whose anger with many Jews is palpable. Indeed, one of his works is The Question of Palestine[209], a stern condemnation of the Zionist movement, whose methods of coming to terms with native Palestinians he believes to be 'orientalist'.

Parrinder has written on Judaism in a number of his thematic and wide-ranging works, but of all the major world religions, it is the one about which he has written least.[210]

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[209]New York, Times Books, 1979.

[210]He has not written much outside his thematic works on Sikhism and Chinese and Japanese religions, but a little more than about Judaism. On Sikhism he has contributed a paper on ''The Nature of God' in Singh, H. (1974) Perspectives on Guru Nanak, Patiala, Punjabi University:83-92. He has contributed articles on 'Confucianism', 'Daoism' and 'Shinto' in Segal, G. (1989), Political and Economic Encyclopaedia of the Pacific, London, Longman:52; 56; 204.

He has published no specific piece about any aspect of Jewish religion outside these general works, except for a short appraisal of Solomon,[211] a figure who is important for Christians, too. His personal experiences with Jews have come in recent years. He wrote that:

> Being invited to become president of the London Society of Jews and Christians was an honour and a way into closer relations between Jews and Christians in the city, after many studies and discussions with members of African and farther Asian religions. (Parrinder, 1987a:120)

Thus, and characteristically, Parrinder has been willing to learn from his involvement as President of the London Society of Jews and Christians from 1981 to 1990 (he is now honorary Life President):

> A little while ago I thought there was not much [anti-Judaism in church services], and I mentioned this in Encountering World Religions [1987a:112]. But now I am not so sure. Preachers tend to throw out condemnations of other religions - les absents ont toujours tort... As President of the London Society of Jews and Christians for the last seven [sic for nine] years... I have become more aware of Jewish sensitivities - e.g. recently on the Archbishop's mention of the Pharisees in a derogatory way,[212] whereas for Jews the Pharisees saved Judaism. We are to have a debate on Oberammergau, and when I went there in 1960 I did not notice anti-semitism, but it was there...[213]

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[211]In Canning, J. (ed) (1985) 100 Great Lives of Antiquity London, Methuen:83-87.

[212]At the time, Robert Runcie, then the Archbishop of Canterbury, had caused controversy and upset in Jewish and Christian circles by referring to some self-righteous aspects of British society as being pharisaical.

[213]In a letter dated 8 January 1990.

Parrinder's lack of an existential knowledge of Judaism early in his career shows in his work. In his book Comparative Religion (1962), there is no mention of the *shoah*, or holocaust as it has come to be known, the murder of six million European Jews during World War 2. Yet surely one of the 'Tasks of Comparative Religion' (the title of his last chapter) for Christians in the second half of the 20th century is to ponder what sort of relation may be possible with Jews, in the light of the churches' compromised and bloody history with them. However, in a school-textbook first published at about the same time (1963), he observed that the holocaust 'was the blackest crime of modern times and the fiercest persecution in modern history' Parrinder, 1968a:159. This reference comes in a chapter entitled 'Judaism: Rabbis and Reformers'. Although this book and other thematic surveys look at post-biblical Judaism, Parrinder does not give the impression that he understands the dynamics of the religion. For example, his material on the Cabbalah and Hasidism in Mysticism in the World's Religions underlines his conviction that communion and not identification with God is the goal of most mystics. The reader does not have the impression that these movements are studied for their own intrinsic importance, but rather, that they serve to emphasise the author's theory taken on other grounds.

In an aside in his small but important work The Christian Debate, which is about what Christians can learn from

Hinduism and, to a lesser extent, Buddhism,[214] Parrinder wrote that 'Orthodox Judaism is still bound by many legal prescriptions that Christians got rid of in the first century , thanks to Paul' (Parrinder, 1964a:135). There is no sense here of the importance of their religious law for modern Jews, only a common, ill-informed and casual Christian criticism of it.

Moreover, Parrinder stumbles, as many Christians do, in his perception of the importance of scripture for Jews. In his review of the symposium The World's Religions,[215] he observed:

> Albert Friedlander's contribution has been criticized in the Jewish press for its limitation to one chapter, contrasted with eleven on Christianity, but he assumes the Old Testament as already covered and gives a useful survey of Jewish history and more... (Parrinder, 1989b:163)

Actually, the Old Testament is itself a Christian interpretative description. More important, whatever one calls the Jewish scripture,[216] it functions quite differently for a Jew than for a Christian. The Pentateuch (*torah*) is the revelatory core, the prophets (*neviim*) are of secondary importance, and the writings (*ketuvim*) a layer below.[217] Many

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[214]See Chapter 7.2.

[215]Edited by Sutherland, S., Houlden, L., Clarke, P. and Hardy, F. (1988), London, Routledge.

[216]The term 'Hebrew Scripture' is often used, but this is inexact. Part of the book of Daniel is in Greek. Perhaps 'Jewish scripture' or *tanakh* would be better.

[217]The initial letters of *torah*, *neviim* and *ketuvim* form the word *tanakh*, which Jews call their Bible.

Protestant Christians, who interpret Paul through the eyes of Martin Luther as severely critical of Old Testament legalism, have an ambivalent attitude towards the Pentateuch, and in practice regard some of the prophets as more authoritative. Parrinder himself reveals this disposition. For example, he refers to the 'Old Testament, where... the belief in the love of God slowly emerged in the prophets, notably in Hosea' (Parrinder, 1974d:117). Moreover, the Jews' use of scripture, related as it is to oral law (*torah she-be-al peh*; the part of the divine revelation to Moses which was not recorded in the Pentateuch but was transmitted by oral tradition) is quite different from that of Christians. To assume that one account of the 'Old Testament' could serve as a satisfactory basis for both religions profoundly misunderstands the different historical and theological developments of Judaism and Christianity.

Throughout Parrinder's writings, there are allusions to the Old Testament, though he rarely cites references. For him, it is clearly a treasured source of his faith which has shaped his life, his thoughts, and even his literary style. But he sees it through Christian spectacles, rarely if ever as the *tanakh*, the Bible as Jews read and interpret it.

6.6 Parrinder: Orientalist?

In post-colonial or even (bearing in mind Edward Said's Palestinian origins) neo-colonial contexts, the term

'orientalist' has served as a depreciatory word to channel the frustration and anger of many 'orientals', particularly Muslims, with western condescension and misinterpretation. But it has been imprecisely, provocatively and polemically used, and has undeservedly stained the reputations of many scholars whose writings and criticisms have been imperfectly assessed and who have not been judged against their historical setting. It has also played down the fact that, whatever their failings, the desire of many of these Christian scholars to learn about other faiths has not often been matched by that of members of other faiths to understand what Christians actually believe rather than what is imputed to them.

However, more positively, 'orientalism' could be said to define a tendency among certain western scholars to view other cultures and religions, especially Islam, through European and Christian categories. The answer to the question, does Parrinder describe only a western and Christian perspective on Islam (or, indeed, Judaism) is, by and large, yes. He comes at the material from a viewpoint shaped by questions and issues from his Christian convictions. He does not reveal much interest in the issues which Muslims and Jews pose for themselves. However, he does not despise what he describes. He discerns God at work in Islam and Judaism, and is candid and sympathetic about Christian history's terrible record in its dealings with both faiths. This sympathy, but also, perhaps, his lack of linguistic skills and sustained personal contacts with

Muslims means that it would be untrue to call Parrinder an 'orientalist'. If his works on Islam do not demonstrate the remarkable academic achievements of the greatest of them, neither does he display their worst defects.

7. Parrinder and the Religions of India

Although Eric Sharpe has called Parrinder an Indologist (Sharpe, 1975:288), it is not a claim he would make for himself. He recalls that E.O. James 'once asked me to write the volume on Hinduism for the Weidenfeld series, but I thought it was beyond me, and it was never done by anyone else'.[218]

In reality, in his writings on South Asian religion, Parrinder has, more clearly than anywhere else, revealed his agenda to be that of a sympathetic Christian theologian, dealing with themes which have appealed to him in that role. In particular, Parrinder has seen India as the place where two radically different understandings of the soul or self and its relationship to transcendent reality were debated: namely, between theism and monism[219]; or, as he has often preferred to put it, between personal or impersonal faith. He has championed theism or belief in personal being(s) as according legitimate points of comparison with the Christian viewpoint. To establish this fact, we shall examine his attitude towards Buddhism, then look at his discussion of comparative Hindu and Christian concepts in The Christian Debate (1964). Afterwards, we

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[218]In a letter dated 13/10/90.

[219]In his A Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions, Parrinder described monism thus: 'From a Greek word for "one", *monos*, monism is applied to philosophical doctrines that only one being exists'; 1981:189.

shall explore the central importance of the Bhagavad Gita for Parrinder's interpretation of Indian religion. This will lead us to examine Avatar and Incarnation (1970) and then Mysticism in the World's Religions (1976).

7.1 Parrinder's interpretation of Buddhism.

Parrinder's interest in Buddhism goes back to his childhood, and to all he learned from Katie Hunt and her brother.[220] Furthermore, he has written about it in a relatively large number of works. As well as sections in his general books on world religions, and his three major comparative studies on worship, mysticism and sex, he wrote an article on 'Early Buddhist Dates' for The Hibbert Journal (1961), a compilation of The Wisdom of the Early Buddhists (1977), an article entitled 'Mystery And Mysticism' which was in the Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series (1977), and a recent collection of The Sayings of the Buddha (1991).

Buddhism has faced Parrinder with his most intransigent problem in locating reverence and worship in God, the gods or god-like figures as a point of comparison between Buddhism and many other theistic world religions. In his inaugural lecture to a personal Chair in Comparative Religion at King's College, London, Parrinder defined the problem in this way:

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[220]See Chapter 1.1

> Buddhism seems to be a religion, but since it does not appear to have a God, or even believe in the soul, it has been regarded as the odd one out among religions. Or it has been considered as a 'do-it-yourself' morality, and not a real religion. (Parrinder, 1972c:20)

His interest in whether Buddhism only seems to be a religion or else actually is one appeared early in his writing career. In his second published article, 'A Reasoned Approach to Religion' (February 1943), he depicted Buddhism as comparable to a theistic religion:

> Buddhism is often claimed as an exception to the personalistic character of religion. The appearance is deceptive. For in its origin, as far as can be accurately determined, Buddhism was not a religion but a world-renouncing way of life for the few based on Hindu philosophy. Buddhism only became a religion when its founder was deified and worshipped, not to mention the innumerable deities added later; in short, when men felt the need for a personal God. (Parrinder, 1943:6)

Parrinder has continued to denote religion in this way. So he has consistently claimed that Buddhism has become a religion on the grounds that its followers, in practice if not in theory, worship God, the gods, the Buddha or some other saviour-type figure. In his book An Introduction to Asian Religions (1957), Parrinder assumed that the 'greater vehicle' of Mahayana Buddhism[221] is a religion, because it has 'enlarged itself to embrace more personal cults', but

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[221]Theravada ('the Teaching of the Elders') Buddhism is sometimes called Southern Buddhism, because it prevails in South-East Asia: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia nd Laos. It claims to preserve the teachings of original Buddhism. Mahayana ('great vehicle') or Northern Buddhism, adds other works to the canon of Theravada scripture, and is found mainly in Tibet, China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

he asked of Hinayana Buddhism[222], 'Is it a religion?' (Parrinder, 1957:84). He argued that it is, because of the devotion given to the Buddha:

> it can be said that the Buddha himself represents for the faithful an ultimate religious symbol. The devotion that is lavished on the Buddha, in Hinayana as well as Mahayana countries, the innumerable statues which are the work of loving craftsmen, the constant offerings, the bowings and prayers, all point to a deep religious experience. It is true that in theory the Buddha is an example, and that the task of the faithful is the "Imitation of Buddha", but imitation turns to adoration and religious experience. (Parrinder, 1957:84)

In Avatar and Incarnation, Parrinder asserted that 'the Buddha is a substitute-deity' (Parrinder, 1970a:180). He recognised that:

> There are some writers who object that not only is the Mahayanist glorification [of the Buddha] a departure from original Buddhism, but that the notion of a Buddha saving men is also an intrusion. Such objections are heard in the western world and on the fringes of Buddhism, from westernized Japanese or Ceylonese. The Buddha is represented as a humanist, a Socratic, almost a scientific figure, and he is not called Saviour except in the sense that he discovered and showed the path to liberation.[223] But in all traditional schools and scriptures the Buddha is regarded as supreme, he has numinous qualities, and not only his teaching but his presence and protection

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[222]Although Parrinder called it 'Hinayana' (lesser vehicle), he noted that its adherents prefer to call themselves Theravadins, followers of the Doctrine of the Elders. Uncharacteristically, he designated a group by the name given by others 'as a term of reproach' (Parrinder, 1957:77).

[223]Parrinder uses religious terminology carelessly here. Salvation is not the same concept as liberation; and the Buddha, which means the 'enlightened one' or the 'awakened', shows the way to enlightenment rather than liberation. In Buddhism, liberation is the result of being enlightened; they are not interchangeable terms.

> are sought, daily, and in the cult of relics and holy places. (Parrinder, 1970a:248)

Yet Parrinder's argument is not persuasive; he misunderstands the importance of the Buddha. Actually, the Buddha shows the way to the cessation of human suffering and is the embodiment of wisdom and compassion; he is therefore the focus of reverence which theists would naturally believe appropriate only for God. But he is 'only a human being; he claimed no inspiration from any god or external power either' (Rahula, 1967:1).

One has the impression that Parrinder sees all the evidence for Buddhism's essential humanism, but does not have the historian's capacity to let it speak for itself.[224] For example, in The Wisdom of the Early Buddhists, he wrote that:

> Buddhism has often been called agnostic or even atheistic, in modern times, and it did reject or ignore much Hindu theology. Hindu gods appear in the Theravada scripture, Brahma, Indra and the like, but they are lay figures or attendants upon the Buddha who

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[224]An interesting anecdote illustrates that Parrinder knew very well of many Buddhists' reluctance to use theistic language:

> Among his many books, he edited the *Hamlyn Encyclopedia of World Religions* only to be taken aback when a friend rang him just before publication to say, "What's this book you've written, *Man and His Gods*?" Geoffrey confessed that he'd never heard of it. "But it's got your name on it!" He rang the publishers to protest at the name of the title, but they simply replied, "Encyclopedias don't sell!" He pointed out that the book included studies of Buddhism and that many Buddhists would say that they have no gods. The second edition reverted to its original title, *An Illustrated History of the World's Religions*. (Ainger, 1995:34)

> occupies the centre of the stage. None of these gods is the Supreme Being, and the Buddha did not acknowledge them as such. He himself was not called a god, indeed that would be unworthy, since the gods are not yet fully enlightened but are caught up in the round of transmigration. But the Buddha is above all these beings and is called 'Teacher of gods and men'. Functionally he is the Supreme Being, and in a confession of faith that dates from early years men cried, 'I go to the Buddha for refuge', as Hindus go to Krishna or Shiva for refuge. (Parrinder, 1977b:6; cf. Parrinder, 1991:8)

He has described a religion which is fascinatingly different from his own. More objective scholars would surmise that the gods are irrelevant and perhaps even the objects of mockery, being denuded of their usual central religious function. They would also note the deeply humanistic aims of Buddhism.

In his article, 'And Is It True?', Parrinder admitted that to call the Buddha a god 'may appear a fair description, from a Western viewpoint, but it needs serious qualification in even the most liberal Buddhist eyes' (Parrinder, 1972c:23). Yet he declared that:

> Whether Buddhism began as an ethic and developed into a religion, or vice versa, it is certain that for millennia it has been a powerful religion. Perhaps, like Johnson's friend, Buddhism tried to be a philosophy but became a religion, because

> 'cheerfulness was always breaking in'.[225] (Parrinder, 1972c:23)

This is a careless, almost flippant couple of sentences. The phrase 'for millennia' is overstated. More to the point, the question about Buddhism as a philosophy or a religion, amusingly though frivolously put, yet again sees the fact of Buddhism through western eyes, and not as most Buddhists perceive it.

In reality, Parrinder rarely gives the impression of understanding and interpreting Buddhism 'from within'. In Worship in the World's Religions he translated *dharma* as doctrine, a very western interpretation of a way of dutiful behaviour to a law which governs the universe (Parrinder, 1976a:100). In his later collection of The Sayings of the Buddha, he offered a more accurate definition, though still emphasised the word 'doctrine', with its Christian resonances:

> Dharma is a complex term: doctrine, teaching, law, norm, virtue, righteousness, religion, truth. The Doctrine is not simple morality or a system of self-improvement. It is a revelation of eternal truth from the omniscient Buddha and transmitted by experts in the Order. (Parrinder, 1991:8)

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[225]The friend of Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-84) was Oliver Edwards (1711-91). Johnson's biographer, James Boswell (1740-95) records him as having said: 'I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in' (17th April, 1778). Parrinder seems curiously addicted to the phrase 'cheerfulness was always breaking in'. He quotes it elsewhere, though never so frivolously; for example, about the Gita's theistic tradition over against the detachment of the Samkhya-Yoga, in 1963a:98.

So, Buddhism proves resistant to Parrinder's definition of a religion. It is a very partial understanding from a western perspective which asserts that 'The question sometimes raised, "Is Buddhism a religion?", finds its answer in the temples and images, the reverence and devotion of all forms of Buddhism"' (Parrinder, 1976a:100). His insistence on Buddhism's commitment to theism is also misplaced: veneration of the Buddha is not necessarily or even obviously analogous to the worship of God, unless that analogy is to hand and of overriding concern to the observer. It is of such import for Parrinder:

> Belief in a Supreme Being appears in most religions, if not all of them, and it is therefore a central item of religious thought which affects the very definition of religion, making Buddhism clearly religious... The Supreme Being is both the object of worship and the source of all truth and goodness. He is transcendental, above, and yet also intimately concerned with the world. (Parrinder, 1972c:24)

The implausible implication of Parrinder's writings about Buddhism is that the definition of theism can be stretched to include devotion to reverence of god-like figures.

A more subtle case for theism in Buddhism has been made by John Bowker, who has argued that:

> there is *no* paradox of theism in Buddhism: Buddhism is irredeemably theistic. God and the gods are simply part of 'what there is'- they are a part, that is, of the total process of change and again-becoming. To a theistic believer of the time, that no doubt seemed a very inadequate characterization of theism. What was fundamentally characteristic of the theism which the Buddha encountered (as it is of most theistic systems) was the placing of God in situations of at least some independence from the process of change and rebirth, since it is in relation to what is independent that a

> soul or self may hope to achieve a related independence or salvation. It might, therefore, have been possible for a contemporary theistic believer to have challenged the Buddha on metaphysical grounds and to ask him to clarify his understanding of the ontological status of such appearances of gods, or indeed of the world itself, or of the continuing life-principle in the human body, or even of the Tathagatha, the perfected one, after he died.
>
> But on such metaphysical questions the Buddha refused to be drawn. (Bowker, 1978:296)

Bowker concluded that, like all religions, Buddhism bears testimony to:

> the basic phenomenological fact, that a sense of God appears historically to have been created in human consciousness, not as a matter of intellectual speculation, but as a consequence of a direct apprehension of theistic effect in the construction of life-ways. (Bowker, 1978:307)

Bowker may be right to interpret Buddhism as 'irredeemably theistic' in the sense that the existence of gods are not denied, but the fact remains that for many Buddhists, especially Theravadins, the gods have always been marginal to the Buddha's solution to the human condition. Such Buddhists are practical if not theoretical atheists. So Lily de Silva, Professor of Buddhism and Pali Studies in the University of Peredeniya, Sri Lanka, writes that:

> One main reason which makes me appreciate Buddhism in preference to a theistic religion is its frank open-mindedness. The Kalamasutta exhorts the disciples not to accept a proposition as true just on the authority of the teacher, scriptures or tradition... Verifiability is an important criterion of truth. Unverifiable propositions regarding the world and humans, such as whether the world is finite or infinite, eternal or not, and whether the world and humans were created by God or not, for which proofs can never be found, are prudently left aside as

> useless speculative pursuits. This pleases me a great deal.[226]

This statement indicates that Parrinder's and even Bowker's convictions have not been tested against the avowed beliefs of many Buddhists. Both have brought to bear a Christian comparative viewpoint, which obscures more than it illuminates the heart of Buddhism.

7.2 Light from the East.

Parrinder's book The Christian Debate (subtitled 'Light from the East') was published in the wake of John Robinson's Honest to God. From a later perspective, it seems incredible that Robinson's work, little more than a 'pot-boiler', should have gained such prominence. Yet it came at a time when whiffs of a new morality were in the air, when the New English Bible New Testament had recently been published (1961)[227]; when, in retrospect, Christianity in England was still a subject of wide interest but the churches, especially the Church of England, seemed remote and out of touch with middle-class aspirations. Certainly, the success of Robinson's work touched the nerves of middle-class, literate people. He was just the man to aspire after being a shaper of The New Reformation, a book he wrote in 1965, picking up a phrase then common among certain Christian theologians. Robinson was a once and

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[226]In Forward, 1995 (forthcoming).

[227]The New English Bible as a whole was not published until 1970.

future Cambridge don, then suffragan Bishop of Woolwich. Adrian Hastings describes him as:

> at heart not unconservative yet with a penchant for appearing a little naughtily radical. In *Honest To God*, which he wrote in hospital in rather a hurry, he picked out some of the more startling themes of the leading radical theologians of the preceding decades - Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann - and melted them together in a brief 140-page book which almost anyone could read. At other times it might have been disregarded. In 1963 it became a best seller. (Hastings, 1986:537)

Actually, it is a badly written book, and difficult to understand. Robinson imperfectly understood much of his material and conveyed his confusion to his readers.

At the very beginning of The Christian Debate Parrinder noted, with a touch of asperity and wry humour:

> On 17 March 1963, feast of St. Patrick preacher of the faith, Dr J.A.T. Robinson, suffragan bishop of Woolwich, wrote a full front page article for *The Observer* entitled 'Our Image of God must go'. This fine advance notice gave great impetus to the book expanding his ideas... (Parrinder, 1964a:10)

Although Parrinder realised that 'the article and the book... set people talking about religious ideas as they had not done for some time', he commented:

> 'Our image of God must go.' Whose image? There are other images than those of traditional Christianity and some may suit the modern world better than the idea of an old man in the sky. (Parrinder, 1964a:31)

Parrinder, however, was not implying that other religions had better answers to modern questions. Indeed, one of his

secondary points was that Robinson had not been entirely fair to Christian tradition:

> That 'our image' of God as an 'old man in the sky' is out of date is obvious. Elementary, my dear Woolwich. We all know this, and many Christians down the ages have known it too, even in the Bible. (Parrinder, 1964a:20)

But Parrinder's book was primarily a response to the western parochialism of the religious ferment of the time. The assumption among the Christian clergy, especially the establishment (including, at that time, Bishop Robinson)[228] was that light could shine only from European or (in the case of Tillich, naturalised) American writers. Yet Parrinder, because he taught some of them, knew that many lay people were deeply interested in other, especially eastern, religions, and was appalled that 'the study of religion even in universities is almost wholly restricted to Christian, and in this country to Protestant, theology' (Parrinder, 1964a:13). He noted that:

> In *The Honest to God Debate*, a summary of many different views on Dr Robinson's book, there is only one slight reference to the effect of far eastern religions upon Christian thought. This is a field to which many leaders and theologians continue to close their eyes. One reason is no doubt because of the difficulty of the subject, its vastness and complexity. Another is the lack of training. It is almost incredible, but true, that very few colleges for training the clergy give any information at all about other religions than Christianity and Biblical Judaism. (Parrinder, 1964a:23)

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[228]Robinson later gave the Teape Lectures in India, which were published as Truth is Two-Eyed (1979). Rather engagingly, and with some insight, he wrote of his invitation to deliver the lectures that 'No one could have been less prepared for this': Robinson, 1979:vii.

Parrinder's book was an attempt:

> to provide a simple guide, not to the history of religion, or all their teachings, but to those doctrines that have an important bearing upon the great problems of thinking men in the modern world. (Parrinder, 1964a:23)

Parrinder examined ten areas in chapters 2 to 11: 'God and Brahman'; 'Soul and Atman'; 'Trinity and Personality'; 'Incarnation and Avatar'; 'Survival, Reincarnation, Nirvana'; 'Material and Spiritual'; 'Prayer and Meditation'; 'Authority and Mysticism'; 'Religion and Society'; and, 'Religions and the Truth'. In order to assess Parrinder's intentions and achievements we shall look at the first three subjects.

In his chapter on 'God and Brahman', Parrinder dealt with Robinson's criticisms of a God 'out there', divorced from the world except to intervene in miracles and the incarnation of Jesus. He shrewdly observed that when Robinson borrowed depth language from Tillich, 'this is still spatial imagery. Why choose depth rather than height...?' Yet the comment he made immediately afterwards was tantalisingly undeveloped: 'Depth suggests the unconscious, and this is dangerous Freudian ground' (Parrinder, 1964a:27).[229] Perhaps; yet it is frustrating to have questions raised, such as the implications of modern

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[229]Although both depth and height are spatial images, as Parrinder points out, the former may yet be a more appropriate image for twentieth century believers in a post-Freudian world. See, further, Monika Hellwig's account of the importance of Tillich for her own spiritual journey in Forward, 1995 (forthcoming).

psychology for religion, and not be given any kind of answer.

In the second half of this chapter, Parrinder posed the question, 'Can Brahman be compared in any way with God?' (Parrinder, 1964a:37). He referred to:

> a famous passage in the first Upanishad [where] an inquirer asks the great sage Yajnavalkya, 'How many gods are there?' there are said to be 3,306, and then in a progressive dialogue their number is reduced to 303, to 33, 6, 3, 2, 1½, and finally to 1. These many gods are but manifestations, but there is One God in whom all the rest grew up. Which is that one? He is Brahman... (Parrinder, 1964a:33)

Parrinder noted that:

> It was said that the gods became Brahman when they are aware of it, and that the many gods are reduced to one in Brahman, which is within and beyond all things... Brahman is indescribable, and can only be indicated by negatives: 'not this, not this' (*neti, neti*). (Parrinder, 1964a:36)

He recognised that this may seem logically to lead to pantheism or monism: 'everything seems to participate in everything else and so *be* everything else', but many Hindus qualify this:

> Hindus prefer to speak of it as non-duality (*a-dwaita*, not twofold). Taken in its barest form this would seem so to identify man and Brahman that there is no room for worship of a personal God, no real existence of the world, and no sin. (Parrinder, 1964a:36)

This strikes at the heart of Parrinder's definition of religion as the devotion to God, the gods or a god-like figure or figures, so one is not surprised to find him continuing:

> However, we shall see in succeeding chapters that there have been many debates in India, and distinct schools which champion pure non-duality, while others maintain a modified non-duality, and others again teach a frank dualism of man and God. (Parrinder, 1964a:36f.)

Parrinder was leaving himself space to champion the belief in a personal God. Perhaps his most telling comment comes at the end of his chapter on 'Trinity and Personality':

> If Christians today have lost their nerve,... they may take comfort from the fact that the most thorough-going attempts in India at depersonalizing the deity failed before the insistent demands of religion. (Parrinder, 1964a:61)

That chapter and the previous one describe the relationship between the individual and transcendent reality. In 'Soul and Atman', Parrinder recognised that 'Atman is used of the "soul of the all" as well as of the individual' (Parrinder, 1964a:45), and he quoted the famous phrase from the Chandogya Upanishad, 'That thou art' (*tat tvam asi*) as 'meaning "you are yourself that Soul, the divine", or "you, the individual, are that universal essence"' (Parrinder, 1964a:46).

He described three schools of thought which debated the matter of the relationship of the individual soul to the world-soul. The champion of monism was Shankara (c788-820):

> The individual soul, the Atman, in Shankara's view, while apparently different for a time from other souls, and also from Brahman through illusion (*maya*), yet fundamentally is nothing but sole Brahman. For Shankara Atman is the same as Brahman, because the 'deepest' part of our being is one with the being of the universe. (Parrinder, 1964a:47)

Parrinder disapproved of this philosophical position:

> Complete non-duality of Atman and Brahman, identity of man and God, would seem to spell the death of religion, or at least of devotion and worship. For how can one worship oneself?... It is interesting that... monists retained or evolved forms of worship which seem to imply what they denied. Shankara... believed that the idea of a personal Lord (Iswara) was useful as a help towards self-purification, and he even wrote hymns to the Lord under different names. Yet he held that this was but a stage, and that finally one should pass beyond the Lord to 'become one with Brahman'. (Parrinder, 1964a:47f.)

The second school is associated with Madhva (1197-1276), who 'opposed the monistic Advaita of Shankara and taught a frank dualism, between God on the one hand, and the world and souls on the other' (Parrinder, 1981:166; cf. 1964a:48f.).

But Parrinder saw the 'most significant' figure as Ramanuja, an 11th century teacher who taught 'qualified non-dualism'. Parrinder explained it in this way:

> Ramanuja pointed out that the human soul is limited, and that claims made by sages to be perfect and identical with Brahman were unfounded, for they were clearly limited in knowledge and power. Commenting on the Bhagavad-Gita, he noted that the Lord is called 'unborn' in a different way from mortals... And again, the Supreme Soul is other than either bound or liberated souls, because he is in a different category from all else. Souls are absorbed in the Lord at the dissolution of all things, but they are not identical with him, and they are separated again at a new creation. (Parrinder, 1964a:49)

Parrinder observed that Ramanuja:

> gave justification to the growing movements of worship and devotion. These all needed a concept of a personal Lord, with whom the soul had relationships of love and union, but not complete identity. This strongly

> personal side of religion... has been of great importance in India, despite the attempts of old and new Vedantists to depreciate its significance. (Parrinder, 1964a:49)[230]

Parrinder preferred Ramanuja's position to that of Madhva, whose dualism seemed to him a Hindu form of Calvinism or Barthianism, stressing the absolute 'otherness' of God. He noted that:

> Madhva emended the famous verse, 'thou art that', to read 'thou art not that'... How can weak man call himself Brahman who is all-powerful and ever-present? (Parrinder, 1964a:48)

Ramanuja's position parallels, in Parrinder's judgement, a more congenial Christian position:

> Modified non-dualism tried to have the best of both worlds, which is perhaps not a bad thing. It pointed a way between extremes, in attempting to give some account of the relationships between the infinite God and limited man with his immortal soul, relationships which are finally indescribable.
>
> These notions may seem strange to Christianity which, it is often said, insists upon the utter difference of God and man, both in degree and in kind. There is no doubt that this is taught in various strands of Calvinism, but there are other strands in Christian thought... With the Old Testament behind them Christian teachers have rarely dared to speak in monistic fashion of 'identity' with God, but many mystics have sought 'union' with him. (Parrinder, 1964a:50)

In his chapter on 'Trinity and Personality', Parrinder considered diversity and personality in God, mostly from an

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[230]Among the 'New Vedantists', he had in mind Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood. Their position 'follows pantheistic lines and hardly does justice to the width of Indian thought, with its many teachings of a personal God': Parrinder, 1964a:18.

Indian perspective. He noted the existence of many deities and commented that:

> the Hindu gods are not simply suggestive as personifying elements of nature. They serve a more useful purpose in showing that personal relationships with God cannot be excluded even from the most refined philosophical approach to religion... Having merged many gods into one neuter Brahman, the Upanishads then gradually had to give place to more personal terms, in which grace and faith could flourish as they cannot in the purely impersonal and abstract concepts of deity. (Parrinder, 1964a:57)

Some passages from Hindu scripture describe, not just the relationship of man to God, but 'even more important for religion... the grace of God, his concern for his creature... There is a hint of grace in the Upanishads, but [it] becomes explicit in the Bhagavad Gita' (Parrinder, 1964a:58f.).

Thus there came about in India, due mainly to the Gita's teaching, the notion that 'God was not just *a* person, but within his infinitude personal relationships could be established'. Even Shankara accepted a complex formula, Being-Awareness-Bliss, *sat-cit-ananda*, which 'shows plurality or differentiation within the Godhead'. Parrinder noted Zaehner's point that this corresponds to Being-Logos-Love or Father-Son-Spirit. He then maintained that 'despite great differences of approach and emphasis, there is a valid comparison here between Christian and Hindu teaching' (Parrinder, 1964a:60f.).

Maybe; but it might have been far more suggestive and exciting to have discussed the differences between

Christian and Hindu beliefs. The Christian Debate is a striking example of a work which anticipates a readership's mood, since only later in the decade did members of the Beatles pop-group briefly espouse the East in the shape of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his teachings, and others follow in their footsteps. Yet Parrinder's analysis did not quite meet the aspirations of those who sought light from the East later in the 1960s: they sought a religious visioning of the world which was quite different from the West's, with which Christianity was deeply associated in their minds. These seekers, liberated by the sexual revolution and in revolt against the Vietnam War, wanted completely different spiritual values, not a system which could be compared carefully with a culture and religion they wished to reject. To them, one of Hinduism's main attractions was that it is not Christianity, nor even like it. For them, Parrinder's comparative methodology was not in tune with the times.

Nevertheless, The Christian Debate is an outstanding example of Parrinder's conviction that comparisons between religions are not only possible but desirable; else, in the modern world, the debate becomes parochial. In a later book, John Robinson himself acknowledged this, recalling that there was 'a useful popular book at the time by Geoffrey Parrinder, *The Christian Debate: Light from the East*, which lifted the discussion out of the rather phrenetic domestic context' (Robinson, 1979:19).

7.3 The Bhagavad Gita.

About the time Parrinder wrote The Christian Debate, he began a verse translation of the Bhagavad Gita, which was eventually published in 1974. He deliberately chose a rhyming form, even though 'rhyme is not used in the Gita, apart from some repetitions' (Parrinder, 1974b:112), so as to 'help readers to memorize important verses and understand the teachings' (Parrinder, 1974b:115). Clearly, for him the Gita's message has been very important, enough for others to learn by heart and for him to devote:

> more than twelve years' work, during which time every verse, almost every word, has been revised scores of times. It aims at being modern and direct, without poetic fancies, archaic coyness or theological distortion. (Parrinder, 1974b:114)

In fact, it is one work with which he has more recently become dissatisfied, believing that versifying it imposes an artificial constraint on its meaning and evocative power. Yet he has persuaded a publisher[231] that the market can sustain another translation of the Gita, and has begun a revision of his earlier rendering. It remains for him 'the most famous Hindu poem and scripture' (Parrinder, 1974b:ix).

Famous to whom? In early manhood, Mahatma Gandhi read it in Sir Edward Arnold's translation, which he preferred as best of all (Parrinder, 1986b:4). Undoubtedly, the Gita has become important because of the Mahatma's influence in

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[231]Oneworld, in Oxford.

modern India; Gandhi was a 'theist', devoted to God, and dying with the word *Ram* on his lips.

In The Christian Debate, Parrinder described it as 'the most influential of Hindu books... known and loved by millions of Hindus today and... sometimes called the Gospel of India' (Parrinder, 1964a:18). He interpreted the Gita as basically a theistic text. In it:

> the avatar Krishna reveals himself to the warrior Arjuna at the latter's request. In a great theophany Krishna appears as Vishnu, all the gods, the universal Lord, the everlasting person, as time, being, not-being, the primal one, the supreme, the great God-head. At this manifold vision Arjuna is terrified and beseeches Krishna to appear again in his limited personal avatar form, and the Lord has pity on him and consoles him. The next chapter then debates whether the search for God as Manifest or Unmanifest is better, and it decides that the way of the Unmanifest is too hard. The highest path to the knowledge of God is that of devotion and love (*bhakti*). Both paths are permissible, but devotion is open to both sexes and all classes of society, and moreover it reveals the innermost nature of God.
>
> For God, though transcendent, is not unmoved by the needs of his devotees. They are 'dear to me', 'well beloved of me' and finally 'positively desired of me'. So love of God, and God loving man, became an open way in India. This led to a great flowering of mystical devotion, often expressed in erotic lines where the soul is compared to a woman beloved of Krishna and united to him. (Parrinder, 1964a:59)

Thus, the Gita becomes a theistic text: Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu, 'the universal Lord'; and impersonal or monistic Brahman is not emphasised, with only a passing comment that 'both paths are permissible'. Yet the truth is not as simple as that.

Parrinder's lack of a convincing historical perspective[232] means that although he portrays the Gita as a seminal text, in which monism gives way to theism and foreshadows *bhakti* and other devotional movements, his readers are not clear whether this is actually so. The suspicion persists that it has a more multi-faceted message than he conveyed in The Christian Debate, and furthermore that its importance in Hinduism is contemporary and has been read back into rather than out of Indian history by Parrinder and Hindu reformers such as Gandhi who were attracted by what they could interpret as its vision of a personal god.

Elsewhere Parrinder admits or implies that the Gita is a work which has been more widely interpreted. A year earlier than The Christian Debate, he had published a book Upanishads, Gita and Bible. It compared teachings of the Bible and the Upanishads and covered much the same ground as the later book (even to the extent of containing identical phrases and sentences), but more thoroughly and in a less popular vein. Parrinder's very first reference to the Gita there offered a date for it, 'about the turn of the Christian era', and, significantly, he admitted that its teaching 'is a fusion of several strands' though he went on to claim that 'the strong theism that emerges reinforced an important line of Hindu thought, and this

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[232]He gives hardly any historical reflection in The Christian Debate; rather more in Upanishads, Gita and Bible and Avatar and Incarnation. But in all these works, his theological interpretation controls his ordering of the facts.

provides a most valuable point of comparison with other theistic religions' (Parrinder, 1963a:15). Later in the book, Parrinder made it clear that when it asks:

> which way is better, the personal or impersonal, the Gita comes down strongly for the former. The way of the Unmanifested is hard, though men who succeed in it come to God just like the others. But those who worship in faith are the most perfect in Yoga,[233] and God delivers them straightaway from the ocean of death-bound existence. (Parrinder, 1963a:99)

The Bhagavad Gita has been central to Parrinder's discussion of Indian monotheism. In his view it has encouraged belief in God and devotion to him. Indeed, more recently he has written that 'God speaks to man in the Gita and he is God with a capital G' (Parrinder, 1987a:57). Therefore, he has always played down other interpretations. In Mysticism in the World's Religions, he wrote that:

> Shankara gave a monistic interpretation to the Upanishads and the Gita, and he is unsatisfactory when dealing with important theistic elements in the Gita, the divine birth and the terrifying transfiguration. (Parrinder, 1976a:97)

As usual, Parrinder preferred the teaching of Ramanuja, who 'came much closer to the spirit of the Gita in his commentary on it and in other writings'. Indeed:

> Ramanuja goes even further than the Gita. Not only does man need God, and God love man, but man is

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[233]Parrinder had, earlier in Upanishads, Gita and Bible, written that 'the word Yoga can be used generally of any ascetic method or technique of meditation and concentration, and there have been great varieties of these in the different Indian religious and philosophical movements'; 1963a:82f.

> necessary to God, as his body. He is needed by God for loving communion. (Parrinder, 1976a:98)

Yet Parrinder was simply expressing a preference. In fact, the Gita is a work from which a number of Indian philosophies and religious schools have drawn material to create their own very different interpretations of ultimate reality. Parrinder could not bring himself to concede this, except in very opinionated and usually equivocal ways. He admitted that 'the Gita contains lines that suit a monistic interpretation, but its main emphasis is theistic and monotheistic', and then condemned Shankara's treatment of the vision of God there:

> If ever there was a mystic vision, this is it. But Shankara gives only brief and formal comments, where he does not twist the verses to suit his own monism. This terrifying deity, he says, is indeed the Supreme Being, but 'he is thyself and none else'. (Parrinder, 1976a:38)

Zaehner's book on Hinduism (1962) was influential in shaping Parrinder's views about:

> "the most significant development in Hinduism, namely its movement towards monotheism,"[234] in opposition to those many Indian commentators who have tried to present all Indian thought as nondualistic, or "pantheistic" as Zaehner called it. (Parrinder, 1976d:68f.)

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[234]Parrinder's is not an accurate quotation, but rather a summary of one. Zaehner actually wrote of:
'the development within Hinduism of strong monotheistic trends on the one hand and the crystallization and ossification of the caste system on the other', Zaehner, 1962:7.

However, Parrinder also noted that Zaehner's book 'is not Hindu-*ism*, for there is scarcely any reference to the practiced religion of India, since Zaehner confessed that "cults" did not interest him and he had not even visited India at that time' (Parrinder, 1976d:68). Although Parrinder himself visited India on a number of occasions, he has never stayed for a lengthy period of time. Both scholars give the impression of imposing an alien or at least a detached point of view on the development of Hindu faith.

In an earlier work, a book review, Parrinder had commended Zaehner's critical commentary on The Bhagavad Gita. He wrote that although:

> most commentators... [including] Radhakrishnan's[235] monistic interpretation... have sought to impose their views on the text... from the outset Zaehner states his intention of letting the book speak for itself. (Parrinder, 1971d:169)

Yet Zaehner was not well-known as a scholar willing to let evidence speak for itself when it could serve his own points of view, as Parrinder well knew. Rather, Parrinder quoted this work (which in his obituary article on Zaehner he called 'perhaps the most outstanding exegetical work by any western scholar of a nonbiblical book' (Parrinder, 1976d:73)) because it cohered with his own interpretation, which he has only reluctantly admitted to be controversial:

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[235]Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) was the first holder of the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics in the university of Oxford (Zaehner's predecessor), and later President of India.

> In this "wonderful work" it becomes clear that the whole purpose of the Gita was to demonstrate the "love of a personal God" which was the crown of mystical experience rather than a pantheistic absorption.[236] Zaehner claimed, with some reason, that many commentators had ignored this distinction, being pantheists at heart, and he interpreted the Gita in the tradition of the theistic Ramanuja rather than the monistic Shankara. For this he has been criticized, and he would admit to being selective, but could also claim to be expounding the Gita in its own light and in accordance with much Indian theism. (Parrinder, 1976d:73f.)

So Parrinder cannot quite hide the fact that his theistic interpretation of the Gita is not the only and objective way of reading the text. Moreover, Radhakrishnan, whose work on the Gita Parrinder dismissed as monistic, was a more subtle writer than either Parrinder or Zaehner admitted. Rama Shankar Srivatsa makes a convincing case that Radhakrishnan was an idealist in the Vedanta school, closer to Ramanuja than Shankara, but influenced by Hegel and western Idealism (Srivatsa, 1975:257-336); he was not, then, a straightforward proponent of what Parrinder interprets as Shankara's monism. Moreover, Parrinder oversimplified Zaehner's interpretation of Ramanuja's commentary on the Gita. Zaehner described Ramanuja's position as 'a qualified monism' (his translation of *visistadvaita*), not as 'theistic' (Zaehner, 1969:8).[237]

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[236]Zaehner, 1969:2f.

[237]Zaehner interpreted this concept to mean that 'the world of change and the world of changeless eternal beings, constitute the "body" of the Lord... God is the eternal centre of both the active universe of matter *and* the totality of immortal and timeless "spirits" or "selves"': Zaehner, 1969:9.

There is an irony lurking here. In his popular book The Christian Debate, Parrinder had argued for appreciating other searches after truth, and for the mingling of east and west as the third reformation (Parrinder, 1964a:12).[238] The first two reformations resulted in a transformation of the churches because of the impact of new ideas and discoveries. Yet Parrinder held up to a western audience for admiration those things which he and many of them already believed, and played down or over-simplified those things which offered different and perhaps more exciting and relevant perspectives on profoundly spiritual matters. As with his interpretation of Buddhism, his portrayal of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita along Christian lines does not reveal him as a scholar who recognises the deeper implications of religious pluralism which would let the other really be other.

7.4 Avatar and Incarnation.

From 1966 to 1969, Parrinder delivered twenty four Wilde lectures at the university of Oxford, which were published as Avatar and Incarnation. In that book, he raised with particular clarity the importance to religion of god-like figures, necessary (as he sees it) for worship and devotion. Although this had long been central to his convictions, he was probably spurred to write specifically about the relationship between incarnation and avatar by

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[238]The first reformation was that of the 16th century, and the second the 19th century scientific and technological changes.

Honest to God. One of the major themes of John Robinson's book was the incarnation of God in Christ and what it could mean in the second half of the 20th century (Robinson, 1963:64-83)

Although there are references to the concept of avatar on only four pages of Upanishads, Gita and Bible[239] (Parrinder, 1963a:13, 39, 40, 99), which was written just before Honest to God, Parrinder wrote a chapter on 'Incarnation and Avatar' in his book, The Christian Debate. In this latter work, Parrinder explained that:

> An Avatar is a descent, a 'down-coming' (*ava-tara*), partly in the spatial sense of a deity descending from heaven. But the word is used generally of any distinguished person as a disclosure of the divine, and of any new and unusual appearance. It is the manifestation of the power of divinity. The Gita says: 'Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, then I send forth myself'. (Parrinder, 1964a:66)

Parrinder's book Avatar and Incarnation (1970) is in three parts: 'Avatars in Hinduism'; 'Buddhas, Jinas and Sufis'; and, 'Christian and Other Beliefs'. In the preface, Parrinder wrote that 'very little critical study had been undertaken previously of the Avatar beliefs of India' (Parrinder, 1970a:7). The first section of the book goes a long way towards redressing that situation, by tracing the concept from the beginning of Hindu religion down to the present day, including the influence of modern Indian

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[239]One reason for this neglect of the subject in this book is because 'avatars do not appear in the Upanishads', Parrinder, 1964a:66).

thought and Christianity. This is a solid and pain-staking piece of scholarship which gives important information not readily available elsewhere.[240]

The last chapter in Parrinder's first section lists twelve characteristics of Avatar doctrines. They are:

1. In Hindu belief the Avatar is real.
2. The human Avatars take worldly birth.
3. The lives of Avatars mingle divine and human.
4. The Avatars finally die.
5. There may be historicity in some Avatars.
6. Avatars are repeated.
7. The example and character of the Avatars is important.
8. The Avatar comes with work to do.
9. The Avatars show some reality in the world.
10. The Avatar is a guarantee of divine revelation.
11. Avatars reveal a personal God.
12. Avatars reveal a God of grace.[241]

This list indicates that Parrinder's detailed work on Hindu avatars was undertaken primarily out of his Christian interest in relating them to his own religion's doctrine of incarnation. In his later book Encountering World Religions, Parrinder noted that 'In the Wilde lectures on *Avatar and Incarnation* I distinguished twelve

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[240]Parrinder hints at the thoroughness of his work: 'It may have seemed tedious to pass in review the various animal and human Avatars of Vishnu, but it is useful to give a summary of what the Epic says about them, since this is not easily accessible, and it is important for the development of the worship of Vishnu'; 1970a:27.

[241]Parrinder gives and elaborates these points in 1970a:120-126.

characteristics of Avatar doctrines that it seems can be fairly traced in the Gita and later Hindu texts, and it may be worth summarizing these in order to show Christian theologians what resemblances there may be between Christian and Hindu teachings' (Parrinder, 1987a:68). He then summarised them. He has continued to see the Avatar doctrines through Christian spectacles.

In The Christian Debate, Parrinder had recognised that the Christian belief in a 'once for all' incarnation in Christ could seem to deny any meaningful correspondence between the two concepts, but he was not persuaded that this was necessarily so, since 'the Epistle to the Hebrews, which invented this phrase, places Christ firmly in the succession of prophets and angelic messengers' (Parrinder, 1964a:72). Thus, even if there are important distinctions between other 'down-comings' and that of Christ, there is the basis for comparing them:

> Incarnation, Avatar and Buddha all reveal something of the essential nature of spiritual reality. And because of this they have been worshipped and adored in Christian, Hindu and Buddhist devotion. A God 'up there', a hypothesis to explain creation, or a characterless Brahman everywhere, are not enough for human needs, nor do they reveal that love is at the heart of the universe. This needs an Incarnation or Revelation which, however explained, is essential to religious devotion. Any reconstruction of theology which leaves this out of account will be too cold ever to influence religion. The experience of other religions can serve as a pointer to the development of Christian theology, and so these religions deserve more serious and tolerant study than they have received in the past. (Parrinder, 1964a:74)

This final sentence alerts the reader to the fact that Parrinder has not primarily seen the concept of avatar as interesting in its own right, but as casting light on Christian faith. This becomes clearer in the second and third sections of Avatar and Incarnation.

The second section describes Jainism and Buddhism, two religions which have no belief in a creator God or gods but which do have powerful and revealed figures; and Islam, where God is so transcendent that incarnation is forbidden. Parrinder noted (in the third section) that 'belief in both Avatars and Incarnation arose in theistic contexts, so that they reveal God. In this, they are different from Buddhism, which ignores God, and from Islam which denies Incarnation' (Parrinder, 1970a:234). Yet he characteristically located analogous god-like or avatar-like figures there, and in Jainism. In the case of Jainism and Buddhism, he argued that:

> Jainism is not humanistic, any more than Buddhism is. It does not teach self-salvation, but dependence upon a supernatural truth revealed by omniscient and adorable transcendent beings.[242] However, this could not guarantee long popular appeal... Eventually Buddhism almost disappeared from India, and Jainism shrank to a mere million or so adherents, before the powerful Hindu Avatar faith and theism. (Parrinder, 1970a:190f.)

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[242]The beings are the twenty-four Jinas who, according to Parrinder, 'have become objects of devotion' for Jains; 1970a:188.

Parrinder depicted the Sufi movements as providing the nearest equivalent to Christian incarnation and Hindu Avatar doctrines in Islam. Yet he concluded that:

> the doctrine of Incarnation was hardly, if ever, understood in the Christian sense. Emanations from God, or identification with God, were acceptable and this harmonized with Indian monism and no doubt was partly produced by it... The Muslim Sufis, then, do not illustrate a universal tendency towards belief in Incarnation but they rather show the binding hold of monism. (Parrinder, 1970a:205)

It is difficult to sustain this monistic interpretation of Sufism. Significantly, Parrinder mentioned al-Hallaj, who could be interpreted as believing in an 'undifferentiated unity of God and man' (Parrinder, 1970a:200), but not the famous and, among many relatively recent Christian scholars of Islam, much-discussed Rabia al-Adawiyya (d.801), who emphasised the soul's love of God. Thus, Parrinder's second section is a very Christian interpretation of Jainism, Buddhism and Islam, imputing to the first two a role for their spiritual leaders which most Jains and Buddhists would not claim for them, and interpreting Islamic mysticism according to its 'orthodox' interpreters who have viewed their religion as far more monolithic than in practice it has ever been.

The last section sees avatar beliefs, or analogous ones in other faiths, through Christian eyes. He wrote of:

> questions... strange to traditional Christology, but... asked today in the light of new knowledge of the teachings of other religions. What think ye of Christ? means to many people, What think ye of Krishna and Buddha as well? Even when Christian faith accepts

> the uniqueness of Christ, that need not imply a lack of relationship to Avatars and Buddhas. In fact the relationship of Christianity to the other religions of the world is largely the relationship of Christ to other teachers. (Parrinder, 1970a:222)

Parrinder used Christian terminology to describe attitudes of other faiths, which inevitably distorts them. For example, there is a chapter on 'Docetism, in Buddhology and Christology'. Docetism, which comes from the Greek word, *dokein*, 'to appear', was an early and simplistic solution to the christological problem; Jesus only appeared to be a human being, but was in fact a divine being walking the earth in disguise. Parrinder observed that 'Buddhism is full of Docetic ideas' (Parrinder, 1970a:244). Similarly, another christological heresy was adoptionism, the view that Jesus as man was 'adopted' and incorporated into the godhead. In his chapter 'Adoptionism: Christ and Muhammad', Parrinder pointed to the:

> cosmic position [of Muhammad], not only in mystical philosophy but in popular faith... It is said that Muhammad told his followers not to praise him as the Christians praised Jesus, but in fact they have done almost that. In many mosques today the name of Allah is written on one side of the wall by the prayer niche, and the name of Muhammad on the other. (Parrinder, 1970a:255)

It may very well be the case that there is a certain suggestiveness in applying concepts of docetism to Buddhism and adoptionism to Muhammad. Yet it is at the cost of not letting other religions interpret themselves through their own concepts.

Adoptionism is a particularly inappropriate word to apply to Islam. Although it is true that certain developments within that religion emphasised the superhuman qualities of Muhammad, Parrinder had observed in Jesus in the Quran that that sacred text 'denies adoptionist theories that God had taken to himself offspring' (Parrinder, 1976b:119).[243] In fact, the later 'cosmic position' of Muhammad needs more careful description than Parrinder gives. The conjoining of the name of God and Muhammad is always described as 'God and his Prophet': the medium is venerated for bringing the message but is rarely confused with its author, God. Moreover, after the death of the Prophet, his sayings and deeds became a secondary source of revelation to guide the community, but they are not to be confused with the primary source.

In his importance for most Sunni Muslims, Muhammad has been closer to the Buddha than to Jesus: they have been superlative human figures for their respective followers, not god-substitutes, still less part of God. Of course, all religions are multi-faceted and develop in myriad ways. Yet to interpret the Buddha, Muhammad and others as saviour figures comparable, in certain ways, in their own religions with Jesus in Christianity begs too many questions, and has led Parrinder into facile generalisation:

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[243]Note Kenneth Cragg's penetrating comment that 'what repeatedly the Quran disavows in its references to Jesus and "divinity" is not the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, but the Christian heresy of adoptionism': in Hick, 1974:138fn4.

> Several processes took place within Islam. Conservative orthodox theology tended towards an extreme transcendentalism which was little different from Deism, just as remote and cold. Sufi mystics approached a monism in which the differences between God and man were abolished; man became God and religion was imperilled. But even these two extremes have found it hard to exclude some mediators: the Prophet himself, the Imams of the Shia, and countless saints. And the great mass of Islam, learned and lay, rich and poor, has clung to faith in the unique but compassionate God and in his sinless interceding Apostle. (Parrinder, 1970a:255)

This précis does little justice to the variegated phenomenon of Islam, its theological and legal diversity, its cultural and linguistic variations which shape it profoundly and in many ways, still less to its internal self-understandings.

Also, in using, in impressionistic ways, precise christological terms with particular and important shades of meaning, Parrinder distorted and oversimplified Christian meaning. This inexact use of important terms means that there is little basis for a serious consideration of differences between Christology and the role of spiritual figures in other faiths: they are bathed and interpreted in a rather hazy Christian light.

Indeed, Parrinder's conclusions about Jesus were unconvincing and rather insignificant. He claimed that:

> The uniqueness of Christ is seen first in his singularity as an individual historical man; much more in his identification with the sole Messiah who plays the central role in the establishment of the kingdom of God; but chiefly in his Death and Resurrection. In these latter ways Christ is different from any other religious figure. (Parrinder, 1970a:221)

This does not convince. Members of other religions would see their figures as uniquely important. Parrinder admitted this:

> It is better to start with the human life and death of Christ in considering... his relationship to other religious leaders who are also called unique. More general arguments for the uniqueness of Jesus are sometimes made, such as the one that instances his 'openness to every situation'.[244] But followers of the Buddha or Muhammad would claim this for their leaders, and they might well assert that they were open to some situations that Jesus never had to face. (Parrinder, 1970a:221f.)

Parrinder did not elaborate how they would be claimed by their followers as unique; he only emphasised their differences from and similarities to Christian perceptions of the centrality of Jesus.

In the last chapter, 'Christ and Other Religions', Parrinder drew out the implications for Christian belief of the concept of avatars in Hinduism. He argued that the avatars:

> were never really men... It is Jesus as a man that Hindus need to understand, and it does not matter if he is only a man to them at first... The doctrine of the Incarnation does not fit easily into all forms of Hinduism, and... the fully monistic philosophers were uneasy with the Avatar portions of the Gita. In modern times monism has become such a popular presentation of Hinduism, against the practice of the vast majority of Hindus, that one hardly dare say 'boo' to a monistic goose. Yet if the pantheists have a right to propagate their monotony, others may claim the freedom to set forth another teaching.

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[244]Parrinder was quoting an article by F.W. Dillistone in Pittenger, 1968:96. He could have claimed that John Robinson's designation of Jesus as 'the man for others' (the title of Chapter 4 of Honest to God) is a similarly vague claim about him.

> The doctrine of the Incarnation can be shown as the fulfilment of what God had already revealed to Hindus. It accords with personal theism... (Parrinder, 1970a:277)

These claims for Jesus form the basis for a serious discussion rather than its substance. The reader is left wanting Parrinder to build upon this christological base, not present it as uniquely important. So, Avatar and Incarnation leaves its reader feeling doubly cheated. There lingers the impression that this helpful and impressive study of Hindu beliefs about avatars could have been even more significant if Parrinder had not been committed to locating points of comparison with the Christian beliefs about incarnation. Since he was committed to such comparisons, and in particular what the teachings about avatars and analogical concepts in non-Hindu religions reveal about the Christian belief in Christ, it is regrettable that his christological reflections are not more weighty.

Parrinder's discussion of Christ and avatars has recently and briefly been taken up by Ninian Smart and Steven Konstantine in their Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context (1991). They seek to present a Christian *darshana* or vision of reality from Anglican and Orthodox perspectives, in distinction to what they regard as the excessive authority of Roman Catholicism and the disintegration of radical Protestantism (Smart and Konstantine, 1991:9,17). Their 'high Christology' (Smart and Konstantine, 1991:254) leads them to reject the many

incarnations of the Hindu avatar religion. Yet they are sympathetic to the impulses lying behind it as the desire 'to see reflected in earthly life the restorative power of the divine' (Smart and Konstantine, 1991:277). This brief discussion adds nothing to Parrinder's point of view, and also looks at the evidence through spectacles fashioned by Christian dogmatic theology.

7.5 Mysticism in the World's Religions.

One reason Parrinder gave for comparing avatar and incarnation was that Aldous Huxley's influential book The Perennial Philosophy (1946) had asserted certain convictions about incarnation which Parrinder believed to be wrong. In particular Huxley had asserted that:

> 'the doctrine that God can be incarnated in human form is found in most of the principal historic expositions of the Perennial Philosophy - in Hinduism, in Mahayana Buddhism, in Christianity and in the Mohammedanism of the Sufis'. He added that 'every human being can thus become an Avatar by adoption', and finally declared that 'because Christians believed that there had been only one Avatar, Christian history has been disgraced by more and bloodier crusades', and so on, 'than has the history of Hinduism and Buddhism'. (Parrinder, 1970a:13)

Yet in Parrinder's view, Hindu monism could be just as assertive as Christian belief in a specific saviour:

> In modern times Hinduism is set up as a model of tolerance, as against the dogmatism and persecutions of Christianity, and the communal struggles and massacres between Hindus and Muslims are glossed over.
>
> Yet the prevailing monism is just as dogmatic. On the one hand it is a confidence trick, which hides the fact that the vast majority of Hindus have always been theists. And on the other hand the modern pantheistic

> attempts to reduce all religion to monism are inaccurate and intolerant. (Parrinder, 1970a:267)

Parrinder's championship of theism over against monism has continued in his works on Indian religions subsequent to Avatar and Incarnation. In his book The Indestructible Soul (1973), which (in the words of its subtitle) is about 'The nature of man and life after death in Indian thought', Parrinder described personal or theistic views as the most important ones held in Indian philosophy or religion. Referring to the famous phrase 'That art thou' which 'means primarily the unity and identity of individual and universal' (Parrinder, 1973b:44), he commented:

> In criticism of the doctrine of monism, it might be asserted that it is saying nothing, except that everything exists or is the same. It is tautology, saying the same thing again in different words. If there is no distinction of individual and universal, then you are you, or it is it. This is no explanation of the universe or man, but the simplest statement that whatever is exists. It is not a religious statement, or an expression of spiritual truth, since no God or distinctive being is involved. (Parrinder, 1973b:45)

The impression is that Parrinder consistently dismisses and distorts, and occasionally even trivialises, an experience he has not had and does not understand, in favour of a viewpoint shaped by one form of traditional Christian theism. He has undermined the importance of monism in the Upanishads, one the one hand by claiming that 'the *Upanishads* are not completely systematic or consistent' (Parrinder, 1973b:45), and on the other by affirming that

they 'are not consistently pantheistic or monistic, stating that all is divine or one' (Parrinder, 1975a:14).

It is Mysticism in the World's Religions (1976) which makes the strongest case for a theistic interpretation of the soul's relationship with God. It is an expansion of the Westcott Lectures for 1973 under the Teape Foundation, which were given in Delhi and Madras. In it, Parrinder observed, disarmingly, that 'for over forty years I have collected works of mystical authorities from Dionysius to Traherne, and from the Bhagavad Gita to Rumi' (Parrinder, 1976a:5). For much of the early and mid 1970s, his attention was focused upon mysticism. In that period, he wrote several other works on aspects of that theme.[245]

Mysticism in the World's Religions is not a book which fills a gap which other scholars had not filled, as some of his other works have been. It expounds a thesis, offering:

> this distinction of different types of mysticism. Theistic mysticism seeks union with God but not identity. Monistic mysticism seeks identity with a universal principle, which may be called divine though that would imply a difference from the human. Non-religious mysticism also seeks union with something, or everything, rather like monism. (Parrinder, 1976a:15)

Parrinder attacked the latter two interpretations of mysticism, especially monism, and instead espoused a theistic one:

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[245]Parrinder, 1972a:307-317; 1976c:48-59; Lewis, 1976:155-165; foreword in Smith, 1976:ix-x; Lancaster, 1977:395-402.

> The notion that mysticism is essentially monistic, having its perfect exposition in the Indian Upanishads, and that all other kinds of mysticism are inferior, is quite common nowadays but it is contradicted by eminent mystics from other schools of thought... [Rather] for the theistic believer God is not the object but the subject, the initiator of the [mystical] experience, which he gives by grace. The theistic claim is often underestimated or ignored, but it is fundamental and deserves proper study as evidence. (Parrinder, 1976a:12, 192)

He explained his theistic criticism of monism in this way:

> The theist does not, or need not, condemn monism so much as find it unsatisfactory for himself and the facts of life. It seems not only to devalue the world and human dignity, but even more to devalue God. And, to him, it devalues mystical experience, which for a theist is a personal communion. It originates in an act of grace which is not simply a divine response but a primary action initiated by God. To say that a theistic mystical experience is the same as a monistic one would seem to him a misinterpretation of what each mystic claims to have experienced. The theist need not deny the validity of the monistic experience, but he might suggest that it has been incorrectly ascribed to the monist himself, whereas on his own theology all true religious experience comes from God. (Parrinder, 1976a:89f.)

This passage comes in a chapter on 'Indian Monotheism', which is found in a section called 'Mystical Theism'. Other chapters on Indian religions ('Indian Philosophical Monism', 'Integration and Isolation: Yoga and Jain', and 'Buddha and Nirvana') are found in the preceding section called 'Mystical Monism'. This ordering of chapters in Mysticism in the World's Religions is an illustration of Parrinder's view that Indian religion above all provides the arena for radically different understandings of the self or the soul, which can be seen as part of ultimate

reality or else as related to it in a variety of different ways.

Mysticism in the World's Religions broadens out this debate to cover other religions of the world. In his chapter on 'Bible and Cabbalah', Parrinder detected two varieties of mysticism:

> Here is the true distinction [in mysticism], between communion and union on the one hand, and identity on the other. Identification with God... is rejected not only by Jewish mystics but by nearly all Christian mystics, by orthodox Sufis, and by monotheistic Hindus going back to Ramanuja and the Bhagavad Gita. This is the watershed in mysticism, not between prophecy and wisdom, or Semitic and Indian, but between theism and monism, between communion and identity. (Parrinder, 1976a:119f.)

This takes issue with R.C. Zaehner, who had proposed the distinction between the Semitic and Indian traditions (Zaehner, 1958:16). More important, Zaehner's description of mysticism threatened Parrinder's presumption that:

> What we are engaged in is not merely a detached study or a record of history, but belief and experience which claim to give the final truth about the universe. Mysticism is not a plug for gaps as yet unfilled by science but, on the contrary, its conviction of the mystical unity at the heart of things may alone provide that order and continuity upon which all other studies depend. (Parrinder, 1976a:6)

This 'conviction of the mystical unity at the heart of things' accords with Parrinder's assumption that religion is devotion to a personal God or god-like figure(s). Zaehner saw things rather differently. According to Parrinder, Zaehner:

formulated his own definitions of mysticism, which are of crucial importance for all his writings. Basic to mysticism is the search for union, but it is interpreted in very different ways according to the views of the expositor. Nature mystics, and those who say that "all is one and one is all" are not teaching pan-theism but pan-en-hen-ism, a word which Zaehner coined to mean "all-in-one-ism"." Then there is pan-theism, "all-God-ism," which is illustrated by the great sayings of the Upanishads like "thou art That," "this self is Brahman," and "I am Brahman." Third, there is theism, "the normal type of Christian mystical experience in which the soul feels itself to be united with God by love." (Parrinder, 1976d:72; cf. Zaehner, 1957:28f.)

Parrinder believed that this too quickly dismisses certain mystical experiences as unrelated to transcendent reality. He was sceptical about Zaehner's pan-en-henic mysticism, who called it profane because no sacred power is implied in the experience. In Mysticism in the World's Religions, Parrinder described Zaehner's Mysticism Sacred and Profane (1957) as 'a massive reply to Aldous Huxley's justification of the use of mescaline to obtain mystical experiences' (Parrinder, 1976a:72). Huxley had observed that the drug gave him a sense of one-ness and identity with other objects. For example, he found himself 'not merely gazing at those bamboo legs [of a chair] but actually being them' (Huxley, 1974:15f.). Zaehner tried mescaline, too, but unlike Huxley, found that it plunged him into 'a universe of farce' (Zaehner, 1957:226). This led Zaehner to think that such experiences and some others often associated with transcendence have nothing of the divine about them. He wrote that 'there is no trace of an actual experience at all' in nature mysticism (Zaehner, 1957:35), a claim which astonished Parrinder, who included nature mysticism under

'Mystical Monism', and believed that not just Christians but people of many faiths have responded to the transcendent through 'the stimulus of nature' (Parrinder, 1976a:23-29).

In discussing the unity of the soul and divine being in Hindu *advaita* teaching, Parrinder admitted that 'it might be the Pan-en-hen-ism which affirms simple oneness' but was clearly happier with those scholars (whom he does not name) 'who have termed it Pantheism because there is an assumption of a divine being, a transcendent and immanent spirit which seems to be different from merely natural monism' (Parrinder 1976a:35). Elsewhere, Parrinder claimed that 'there may be a close similarity or even identity between natural and monistic mysticism, what Zaehner called pan-en-henic and pantheistic... [since] Huxley even felt that he *was* the legs of a chair, and this was experience of the Absolute, of Being-Awareness-Bliss' (Parrinder, 1976a:192; cf. Huxley, 1974:15f.).

Perhaps Zaehner denied Huxley's claim to a religious mystical experience through the use of drugs as an expiation for his own drug parties held to gain political information when working for M16 in Iran.[246] Parrinder, unburdened by a guilty past, has been inclined to accept all mysticism as related to the quest for 'union with the Deity by contemplation and self-surrender' (Parrinder, 1981:196). Nevertheless, he has been critical of mystics

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[246]See Chapter 3.3.

who seek absorption in God, rather than union with him. He reproved J.N. Findlay's book The Ascent to the Absolute (1970), on the grounds that, according to him, 'the logic of mysticism... is monistic' (Parrinder, 1976a:190).

In the last chapter of Mysticism in the World's Religions, 'Mysticism and Religious Experience', Parrinder wrote:

> Negations may suit some philosophers, but there have been constant reactions against them among religious people, and even nature mystics are rarely content with mere oneness and seek for the 'Spirit that impels all thinking things'.[247] The theistic mystical experience is different from pantheist or pan-en-henic because it seeks a union with God in a relation of love. There can hardly be love for the negative Absolute or for chair legs, since love requires personal relations and some difference of subject and object. Theistic mystics have spoken of being lost in God, or melted away in love for him, but some distinctness of the soul must remain in order to have the experience of divine love. (Parrinder, 1976a:193)

Must it? It may simply be that Parrinder has operated with too simplistic a model of personality and relationships. It is difficult to locate precise influences upon Parrinder's belief in the soul's relationship to a personal God. Perhaps the enormous popularity of the Jewish scholar Martin Buber's book I and Thou has moulded his thought. Parrinder quoted Buber's dictum that 'the difference in relations with persons and things is fundamental', and interpreted him as advocating relationship and not identity with God (Parrinder, 1976a:119; cf.Buber, 1937:79). Yet

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[247]The quotation is from William Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey.

Christian faith, unlike Jewish, has been trinitarian. Parrinder argues that:

> In Christian mysticism the complexity of belief in the Trinity has ensured the maintenance of doctrines of transcendence and immanence, and of loving union with Christ. Although some Christian mystics have spoken in impersonal terms, Christ has remained central to Christian mysticism and forms its distinctive element. (Parrinder, 1976a:194)

Yet trinitarian belief could surely imply a more complex and multi-faceted analogy for divine-human relations than Parrinder discerns and Buber offers: if God wears many masks, then human relationships with the divine being might be many and various, even if the second person of the Trinity (who is not exhausted by Jesus of Nazareth, as Parrinder's *logos* christology might have told him) remains central and distinctive to a Christian interpretation of divine-human encounter. Furthermore, Jungian insights into the collective unconscious could provide models for a more subtle and many-sided understanding both of human and divine individuality and plurality than Parrinder has employed.[248]

Often, Parrinder seems to disallow Christian experiences which do not fit his own; or else he finds it impossible to allow others a more subtle plurality of ways in which to discern ultimate reality. In his discussion of the teaching of Meister Eckhart, the 13th century German Dominican, Parrinder complained that:

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[248]Samuels, 1985:*passim*; but especially 98f., a section on 'The transpersonal self: (i) the God-image'.

> he is quoted endlessly as one clear example of the monistic or pantheistic within Christian mysticism... [yet] despite vague allusions and ambiguities it seems that Trinitarian doctrine saved Eckhart from an undifferentiated monism. (Parrinder, 1976a:148f.)

And Parrinder referred, disapprovingly, to an:

> extraordinary example [of a hymn] in which [Charles Wesley] seems to verge on monism, though probably not of Shankara's type...
>
> > Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea
> > and lost in thine immensity. (Parrinder, 1976a:160)

Yet both Meister Eckhart and Charles Wesley need not be assumed to be illogical and inconsistent in describing their spiritual experiences. They may more simply and correctly be interpreted as having religious insights which do not easily fit into Parrinder's sharp distinction between theism and monism. In The Christian Debate, Parrinder had described Christian mysticism thus:

> Mysticism seeks union with God, the ground of the universe, revealed as love in his Incarnation. But this is not the preserve of a few specialists, who have time for this in monasteries or retreats. For all religion is concerned with the meaning of life, the knowledge of God, and not merely as philosophical explanation but as a living experience. Every sincere prayer is mystical, and the difference between the ordinary believer and the expert is simply a matter of degree. From the first personal religious experience there is a growth into mystical union, as one passes through the ashrams or 'many mansions' of this life and the next. (Parrinder, 1964a:130)

This is an admirable democratisation of religious experience, to include laypeople alongside religious 'specialists'. Yet religion, including the Christian religion, is more than this somewhat Protestant

interpretation. It is about untamed human experiences as well as domesticated ones, about 'Our Savage God'[249] as well as the lover of souls. Significantly, there is no mention in Mysticism in the World's Religions of the Shia Muslim practice of flagellation at the festival of Muharram, which some undergo and others admire.[250] Parrinder's interpretation seems too neat. By selecting, comparing and cataloguing mystical religious experience, he tames it.

7.6 Missed opportunities.

By focusing much Indian religious history and experience upon two trends, monism and theism, and concentrating his attention on these, Parrinder missed certain opportunities which he might be expected to have taken up and developed.

In Avatar and Incarnation, he wrote that Christians:

> have invented titles for them [other faiths] which they did not use previously, such as Hindu*ism*, Buddh*ism*, and so on. But to their followers they are monks of the 'way of Buddha', or 'devotees' of Krishna, or 'submitters' to Allah. (Parrinder, 1970a:269)

This suggestion, as he indicated, has been associated with Wilfred Smith.[251] Yet Parrinder makes nothing of it. His was

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[249]The title of a book by R.C. Zaehner (1974). Parrinder refers to it in Mysticism in the World's Religions, but only to repudiate its criticisms of the Gita: 1976a:93.

[250]Nor is this practice noted in his entry on 'Muharram' in A Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions, 1981:192.

[251]Smith wrote that: 'I have not found any formulation of a named religion earlier than the nineteenth century: "Boudhism" (1801), "Hindooism" (1829)...' Smith, 1962:61. According to him, Islam only came to be used in a reified

only a response to Barthian notions that Christianity is not a religion, 'to which it can be retorted that the others also are not "religions"' (Parrinder, 1970a:269).

If Smith's observation was correct, then Parrinder's experience in Africa of African Traditional Religion might have led him naturally and illuminatingly to a description and analysis of Hinduism as Indian Traditional Religion, with certain features in common (for example, perhaps, a developing belief in a Supreme Being) but with different local emphases. Indeed, writing of his trips to India, he has recently observed that:

> In some ways it had been an advantage to come to India from Africa, and when I spoke of African religion in the university at Varanasi, it was remarked that this was just like the religion of Indian villages. (Parrinder, 1994b:69)

But Parrinder has concentrated on a Christian comparative approach to Hinduism to the detriment of what might have been an approach he was especially fitted to pursue. He might have produced a definitive or at least an important book on 'Indian Traditional Religion'. Moreover, if he had concentrated upon an equivalent or alternative concept in India to what he had described in African religion as *force vitale*, he might have been less inclined to labour the point of the importance of transcendent being or beings.

Furthermore, he has not been as sceptical about the value of the term 'religion' as Smith; not ambivalent at all, in

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sense at the end of the 19th century: Smith, 1962:115.

fact. For him, religion is devotion given to transcendent reality as mediated through god-like or saviour-like figures. This is revealed with especial emphasis in Avatar and Incarnation. Precisely because that is not one of Parrinder's popular books but a serious contribution to scholarship, it provides probably the best example for an estimate of his strengths and weaknesses as a comparativist.

There is of course a place for Christian reflection on other faiths, which relates and contrasts them or themes between them. But there is also the need to enter into and to try to understand 'otherness', rather than to place it in pigeon-holes which fit a Christian belief in God or a category of god-like figures which makes for easy correlation with Christian experiences of transcendence. Like many other of Parrinder's works, particularly his thematic books on worship, mysticism and sex, Avatar and Incarnation contains much illuminating material, hard to find elsewhere except in many and far-flung sources. Similarly, his enthusiasm for the comparative method in many more of his works makes fascinating connections many readers would otherwise miss. Sometimes, however, he too easily falls into the trap of believing that an English word or concept found in one religion has the same range of meanings elsewhere, which leads him to detect superficial or even misleading resemblances.[252] Moreover, sometimes one

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[252]See, for another example than those offered in this chapter, the discussion on the word 'saint' between Muslims

craves an objectivity that would be more free to let other faiths be other, mysterious, demanding from those new to studying them a willingness to listen and learn, rather than recognise and catalogue.

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and Christians in Chapter 6.3.

8. Parrinder: an Evaluation of his Achievements as a Christian Comparativist

Geoffrey Parrinder's first published work appeared in June 1939, three months before the outbreak of the Second World War. A flow of articles and books since then has not yet ceased, nor even slowed down. Indeed, he has written in an amusing and self-deprecatory way, that 'writing is a disease, and only rheumatic fingers or blurred eyesight will make me stop'.[253] Among other writing projects, he is presently revising a novel with an African setting, and writing an account of his and Mary's memories of their days in Africa. He has outlived not only his older mentors, E.O. James and Edwin Smith, but also his distinguished contemporaries, such as S.G.F. Brandon and R.C. Zaehner. His has been a long, productive and distinguished career.

He has always espoused the comparative method, and contrasted other faiths with Christianity from a theological perspective.[254] So, in order to assess his contribution to the study of religion, it is appropriate to compare his achievements with those of some other scholars in the field. We shall look at his contribution to the contemporary Christian theological debate about the nature and scope of God's presence among humankind, including the

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[253]In a letter dated 14/12/89.

[254]See Chapter 3.2.

meaning of Jesus for Christian life and faith. This will lead to an examination of his views about mission. Afterwards, we shall assess his accomplishments by contrasting them with those of a contemporary scholar, Lesslie Newbigin (b.1909) and a younger one, Diana Eck (b.1945).

8.1 Soteriology.

In his book Religions in Conversation, Michael Barnes argues that:

> The problem of religious pluralism is the problem of 'the other', the one who dresses differently, behaves differently, perhaps speaks a different language, and whose life seems to be guided by principles very different from our own... It is easy to ignore or patronize strangers, it is much more difficult to take them seriously, to accept them on their own terms, not just on ours, and to be prepared to live in their world rather than in ours. (Barnes, 1989:3)

Barnes contends that a relevant Christian theology of religions, which takes the fact of religious pluralism seriously, is urgently needed in the contemporary world. He and several other theologians argue that we are living through a period when there is a significant paradigm shift. The term is borrowed from the philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn: a paradigm is 'a framework of meaning that makes sense of a body of data perceived as a system'.[255] As applied to a theology of religions, the concept of a paradigm shift acknowledges that our knowledge of data

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[255]Kuhn, T (1970) The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed., Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

about other faiths can no longer be contained within old theories. Rather, what is needed is a new theory which will cope more adequately with the "facts" of experience (Barnes, 1989:10).

In recent years, many responses have been made by theologians to the fact of religious pluralism. Barnes records that 'they summarize a vast amount of material from all sides of the Christian tradition and show a remarkable agreement about the "map" of the area' (Barnes, 1989:11). Alan Race's book Christians and Religious Pluralism, which was first published in 1983 by the SCM Press, and revised in 1993 with an important final chapter, 'Ten Years Later: Surveying the Scene', has been important in the last decade in describing the parameters of the debate. The subtitle of the first edition drew attention to 'Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions'. Race sees three: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. To put these 'patterns' at their simplest: the exclusivist maintains that salvation is only given to those who make an explicit commitment to Jesus Christ; the inclusivist affirms that salvation is bestowed on more than just Christians, because of all that God has done through Jesus Christ; and the pluralist affirms that humans are saved within their own faith traditions, not (except for Christians) because of the person or works of Jesus.

Race defends the pluralist position. However, in his Theology and Religious Pluralism (1986), Gavin D'Costa

accepts the pattern but defends inclusivism. Barnes himself argues that many theologians of religion are not responding to the same problem: 'exclusivists take as their primary value faithfulness to the tradition', whereas pluralists begin with the very different enigma of 'what is the *theological* meaning of the other?' (Barnes, 1989:12f.). He believes that both issues are important, but does not think that 'the inclusivist paradigm manages to bridge the gap as a genuine third way' (Barnes, 1989:13).

Barnes sees the exclusive paradigm as a 'salvation problem' and the pluralist paradigm as a 'truth problem'. Yet an inclusivist like Gavin D'Costa articulates a widely held conviction that 'the central theological question that arises in a Christian theology of religions is whether salvation is possible outside Christianity' (D'Costa, 1986:2).

Moreover, salvation has been integral to the theological reflections of pluralists, too, as I propose to show in due course. Therefore I would argue that, basically, the central issue for many writers in this field is that of soteriology. The rest of this section records Parrinder's recognition of the paradigms of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. It then briefly examines certain representative figures of the three models to underscore the centrality of soteriology to their quest.[256] Although

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[256]Within the scope of this chapter, it is impossible to do more than mention a few such figures, not even necessarily the most important ones, in order to establish

such writers have recorded many wise and judicious things, it then questions whether soteriology is an adequate basis for a contemporary theology of religions. Parrinder's reflections upon the importance of salvation are incorporated in the course of the discussion.

Parrinder is aware of this debate but has not contributed to its development or refinement. In Encountering World Religions, he defined it correctly:

> The Exclusive [position] maintains that only its teaching is right and all other ways are excluded. The Inclusive seeks to bring other teachings within the range of its own faith. The Pluralist recognizes that there are different ways, which may run parallel to each other. (Parrinder, 1987a:224)

He warned that:

> The Pluralist position is not satisfactory if it is taken to mean that religions will forever run parallel to each other without any mutual effect, for one great feature of today is that all religions may be affected by others... [It] is also unsatisfactory if it is taken to mean that all religions are the same, which they clearly are not, or that it does not matter what people believe. Questions of truth and goodness are important. The religion of the ancient Aztecs, who held up the beating hearts of their victims to the sun, was clearly not so good a faith as the peaceful way of the Buddha. (Parrinder, 1987a:224)

Although these are pertinent comments, they miss the nuances many proponents of pluralism give it. This is significant. Parrinder has not been interested in the complexity of theological debate, but in its broad brush strokes. No doubt he would be deemed an inclusivist by

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certain points about the place of soteriology in contemporary Christian theologies of religions.

proponents of this thesis, but it may be truer to recognise that he does not see it as a particularly convincing model. Yet, if he has reservations about the pluralist position, he would surely be even more sceptical about the exclusivist paradigm, as his criticisms of Kraemer, Barth and Brunner indicate.

Hendrik Kraemer is an outstanding example of a proponent of the exclusivist paradigm. His theology and Parrinder's reaction to it have been briefly described earlier in this thesis.[257] It has considerable strengths. In particular, it emphasises the importance of faithfulness to tradition, if one is to engage seriously and fruitfully with others: in following Barth by locating Jesus Christ as the focal point of God's revelation to human beings, and humanity's response to God, Kraemer was surely underlining a central Christian necessity, even if the details of his view need refining and supplementing.[258]

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[257]Chapter 2.2 and 2.3.

[258]In his important though brief book The Dialogical Imperative (1988), David Lochhead has argued that a theology of interfaith dialogue is possible from the perspective of a Barthian emphasis on the priority of revelation. In his chapter on 'Religion and Faithfulness: the case of Karl Barth', Lochhead contends that Barth's critique of religion (which was first and foremost a critique of Christian religion) is a defence of the free sovereignty of God. Lochhead describes four criteria which Barth lays down if genuine words of God are to be recognised outside the sphere of Bible and of Church: the word from the world must cohere with the witness of scripture; the worldly word must be in continuity with the confessional tradition of the Church; it must bring forth fruits that are consistent with the gospel; it may be judged by the effect that it has on the Christian community itself. (Lochhead, 1988:37ff.)

Kraemer wrote that:

> I coined... the term 'Biblical realism' in order to express the idea that the Bible, the human and in many ways historically conditioned document of God's acts and revelation, consistently testifies to divine acts and plans in regard to the salvation of mankind and the world, and not to religious experiences or ideas. Religious experiences or ideas are of course not absent from the Bible, and they are by no means unimportant, but in no sense whatever are they *central*. What is central and fundamental in the Bible is the registerings describing and witnessing to God's creative and redemptive dealings with man and the world. (in Paton, 1939:1f.)

Thus, salvation was a major concern to Kraemer. Yet although many people have noted his knowledge of other faiths, his particular Christian perspective coloured his reading of other religions to the point where he was unable to appreciate not only their nuances but also some of their central concerns.[259] Moreover, he overemphasised the totalitarian nature of religions,[260] though whether this is the result of his 'Christologically exclusivist starting point and also his phenomenological method and assumptions' (D'Costa, 1986:63) may be open to doubt, or at least need supplementing with other reasons. His totalitarian interpretation of Christianity from a Pauline perspective that emphasises justification by faith inculcated in him an excessively theoretical and narrow attitude towards the phenomena of religion. A notable example of this is his

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[259]See, for example, the brief discussion above in Chapter 2.3 about Kraemer's knowledge of Islam.

[260]Zaehner, 1958:chapters 2,3; and Zaehner, 1970:chapters 6-8.

stated support for the necessity of indigenisation, which he did not, in practice, achieve.[261]

Perhaps the most influential modern proponent of inclusivism has been the German Jesuit, Karl Rahner (1904-86). He has been described as 'the major architect' of the post-conciliar Roman Catholic contribution to the issue of religious pluralism (Race, 1983:45), though many of his writings predate the reforms of Vatican 2. Rahner self-confessedly looked at pluralism from the perspective of the dogmatic theologian, not of a scholar of other religions (Rahner, vol. 5, 1966:117f.).

The Council of Florence (1438-1445) had defined the axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church),[262] to mean that, in effect, 'all those outside [the church] are a *massa damnata*, an abandoned heap, excluded from salvation' (Küng, 1976:97). Rahner's well-known and controversial concept of the 'anonymous Christian' (dating originally from 1961) robbed that conciliar axiom of its exclusive edge, by emphasising God's universal salvific will:

> When we have to keep in mind both principles together, namely, the necessity of Christian faith and the universal salvific will of God's love and omnipotence, we can only reconcile them by saying that somehow all

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[261]See Bishop Stephen Neill's comments about Kraemer's responsibility for the Balinese Church's reflection of the Dutch Reformed Church in 'its inner and outward life', recorded in Chapter 2.3.

[262]The concept dates from the time of Origen (186-255) and particularly Cyprien (d.259).

> men must be capable of beings members of the church; and this capability must not be understood merely in the sense of an abstract and purely logical possibility, but as a real and historically concrete one. (Rahner, vol. 6, 1966:391)

Rahner's concept of the 'anonymous Christian' centres on Christ and the church. As Paul Knitter puts it:

> Whatever saving grace is present in the world has to be constituted and caused by the event of Jesus Christ. Rahner, however, does not consider Christ as an *efficient* cause of grace, as if Jesus had to *do* something to bring about God's universal love. Rather, Christ is the *final* cause of God's universal salvific will: what God, from the beginning of time, had in mind in calling and offering grace to all humankind. Jesus of Nazareth is, then, the final goal, the end product of the entire process of universal revelation and grace. For Rahner, the final goal is a necessary cause of salvation. Without the goal, realized in one historical individual, the entire process would not take place: God desires the salvation of everyone; and this salvation is the salvation won by Christ. (Knitter, 1985:128f. cf. Rahner, vol 5, 1966:118,122)

Rahner's concept has been attacked by many. For example, Hans Küng has criticised Rahner's ecclesiology, particularly the implicit acceptance of the axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, arguing that Rahner had made the church everywhere yet nowhere (Küng, 1976:98). John Hick has called the idea of the anonymous Christian 'an honorary status granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it', and attacked it as 'offensive to the non-Christians, reflecting the chauvinism and paternalism that creates barriers' (Hick, 1980:68).

Küng's and Hick's criticisms may not be entirely fair. In an important passage in volume 17 of his Theological Investigations, Rahner contends that grace is mediated

through, not despite, the non-Christian's religion, judging death-bed illuminations and private revelations to be 'arbitrary and improbable postulates' (Rahner, vol 17, 1981:42). Gavin D'Costa believes that:

> It would be perfectly possible to abandon the *term* 'anonymous Christian' but not the underlying conviction and reality which it denotes - that when a person is saved, it is by God's grace that they are saved. (D'Costa, 1986:90)

This is well put. However, although Rahner's position is a coherent and plausible, and even (which some of his critics have not admitted) sympathetic Christian reflection upon religious pluralism, its formulation solely from within internal dogmatic Christian categories is surely unnecessarily limiting. Barnes refers to it as 'theological colonialism' (Barnes, 1989:131). Certainly, in the modern world, Christian theologians will be heard and read by people of other faiths, and their discourse will need to take this into account.[263] Furthermore, to reinterpret flawed

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[263]D'Costa recounts a conversation between Rahner and Keji Nishitani, head of the Kyoto Zen Buddhist school. Nishitani asked Rahner how he would respond if treated as an anonymous Buddhist. Rahner replied:

> Certainly you may and should do so from your point of view; I feel myself honoured by such an interpretation, even if I am obliged to regard you as being in error or if I assume that, correctly understood, to be a genuine Zen Buddhist is identical with being a genuine Christian, in some sense directly and properly intended by such statements. Of course in terms of objective social awareness it is indeed clear that the Buddhist is not a Christian and the Christian is not a Buddhist. Nishitani replied: Then on this point we are entirely at one. (D'Costa, 1986:91f.; cf Rahner, vol 16, 1979:219)

Thus, Küng's criticism is misplaced: 'it would be

parts of Christian history is perhaps to avoid the necessity for repentance and renewal: the axiom of the Council of Florence might need abandoning rather than reinterpreting.

One of the most influential pluralists has been the British philosopher of religion, John Hick (b.1922). In his essay, 'Whatever Path Men Choose is mine', he dismissed the goal of a single human religion as unlikely to be achieved; and undesirable since there would 'always be the more mystical and the more prophetic types of faith, with their corresponding awareness of the Ultimate Reality as non-personal and personal' (Hick, 1980:58). Hick's call for a Copernican Revolution in our thinking must be understood in the light of this affirmation of plurality. He argues, from an astronomical analogy, that the old, Ptolemaic paradigm placed Christ at the centre of the religious universe; though often, in practice, Christianity substituted for him:

> The traditional dogma has been that Christianity is the centre of the universe of faiths, with all other religions seen as revolving at various removes around the revelation in Christ and being graded according to their nearness to or distance from it. But during the last hundred years or so we have been making new observations and have realized that there is deep devotion to God, true sainthood, and deep spiritual

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impossible anywhere in the world to find a sincere Jew, Muslim or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an "anonymous Christian" as presumptuous' (Küng, 1976:98). Even so, Rahner needed to explain his concept to Nishitani, which suggests that it is capable of being heard as offensive in a plural world, unless carefully interpreted.

> life within these other religions; and so we have created our epicycles of theory,[264] such as the notions of anonymous Christianity and of implicit faith. (Hick, 1983:82)

Hick 'takes his initial stand on a soteriological axiom: the universal will of God to save' (Barnes, 1989:77). Yet, ironically, his commitment to a soteriological attitude towards other faiths, which affirms many paths to the centre, has led him to add various epicycles to his own Copernican theory in the wake of strong criticisms of it.[265]

In a recent article, he argues that salvation-claims rather than truth claims are centrally at issue in understanding the relationship between Christianity and the other great world religions. He means by salvation not that religions are themselves salvific but that they are channels of supernatural salvific power. Furthermore, he does not interpret salvation in its 'traditional intra-Christian sense' of the fall of humanity and its restoration in Christ, but rather to connote that 'each of the great world faiths sees ordinary human life as being defective or unsatisfactory, and as standing in contrast to a limitlessly better state in a right relationship to, or

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[264]He defines epicycles as 'imaginary circles centring on the circumference of other circles, thus forming new and more complex paths which were closer to the actually observed orbits of the planets'. Such circles could in principle extend the Ptolemaic system indefinitely, 'but sooner or later the human mind calls a halt to such an artificial procedure' (Hick, 1983:81).

[265]For example, Julius Lipner has criticised him for using 'God' language, inappropriate for many Buddhist and other ways of faith (in Rousseau, 1981:167f.).

within, the ultimate divine Reality of which they speak'. Indeed, he has come to prefer the 'hybrid term' of 'salvation-liberation' rather than simply 'salvation' (Hick, 1994:12f.).[266]

Hick's assumption that liberation and salvation are interchangeable terms ignores the range of meanings each has in scripture and recent Christian theology, and applies one concept to all religions as their goal. It also assumes that salvation is a more positive concept than it seems to some other theologians. For example, Beverley Clack has persuasively argued that:

> at this juncture... a change from the language of salvation to the language of liberation is necessary. It seems to me that the challenge of feminist thinking lies in the way in which it has exposed the negative understanding of the natural world and the place of humanity within it assumed by much of the language of salvation. Moreover the language of salvation has been dependent upon the Genesis narrative of the Fall, a story which has been used against women who have been categorised by many of the leading theologians of the tradition as 'daughters of Eve', and thus responsible for the perilous state of fallen humanity. (in English, 1994:161)

Hick also argues that because the religion of 98% or 99% of people is governed by where they were born, the older, narrow view of salvation, which asserts the necessity for everyone of personal faith in Christ, will not do (Hick, 1980:44). Certainly, those wedded to soteriology (including Hick himself) must willy-nilly ask, as an essential and

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[266]In a new foreword to the recent re-publication of Hick's God and the Universe of Faiths, he affirms that the world's religions are 'different spheres of salvation/liberation' (Hick, 1993a:viii).

over-riding part of their theological task, who is to be saved and how. Ironically, Hick is sufficiently tied to his narrowly Protestant and evangelical past[267] rather than liberated by the views he presently holds, not to be able to see that this is not the only nor even the most important question to be asked in a religiously plural world.

Some theologians of religion have pointed to weaknesses in a soteriological interpretation of other faiths. Kenneth Surin has attacked the notion that 'the difficulties that stand in the way of an adequate understanding of the relationships between the various major traditions can be overcome if only we are able to get our theories and doctrines "right"' (in D'Costa, 1990:202). He is persuaded, by work done in other intellectual fields,[268] that 'it will not be too long before ... exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism [will be seen] only as part of the history of a certain set of ideas' (in D'Costa, 1990:210).[269]

Michael Barnes also questions the theoretical basis of many current theologies of religion, urging that 'we resist the temptation to cope with the other, a *person*, by fitting him or her into a *system of thought*' (Barnes, 1989:160). These

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[267]At university, he 'became a Christian of a strongly evangelical and indeed fundamentalist kind' (Hick, 1980:2).

[268]Surin specifies African-American studies, feminist studies, the study of Third World literatures, semiotic theory, and cultural studies.

[269]Section 3 of this chapter amplifies Surin's argument.

systems of thought may seriously misinterpret different ways of believing, a point that has been powerfully made by Joe DiNoia.

DiNoia has noted that, whether they be inclusivist, exclusivist or pluralist, 'prevailing positions in the field of theology of religions for the most part focus their energies on allowing for the possibility of salvation outside the ambit of Christianity' (DiNoia, 1992: ix). In an important passage, he observes that:

> There is an understandable tendency for Christians to want to voice their concerns for other religious communities by saying that they, after all, set out to accomplish just what Christians set out to accomplish, though they express things differently. But a more appropriate strategy might be to try to determine whether the different modes of expression did not in fact signal importantly different aims. (DiNoia, 1992:54)

It certainly seems that salvation is not a category which other people of faith than Christians use in order to interpret their relationship with transcendent reality. In Islam, for example, the Arabic word for salvation, *najah*, occurs only once in the Quran (40:41). Sunni Muslims more characteristically want to obey the revealed will of God, by following the *sunna* ('trodden path') of the Prophet Muhammad's deeds and actions, which is not the same thing as desiring to be saved.

Of course, other world religions provide a vision or visions of how to live faithfully in this life and hereafter. In a broad sense, it is possible to locate a

'soteriological' structure in most if not all faiths.[270] Yet the concept of salvation does not adequately describe the aspirations contained within these structures, precisely because it imposes on them a Christian framework of meaning: 'the major religious communities... direct their adherents to final aims of life that seem, at least on the face of things, to differ from one another' (DiNoia, 1992:35).

Despite DiNoia's criticisms of a soteriocentric framework for dialogue, he admits to a necessary element of inclusivism in a Christian understanding of religious pluralism. He does so on the grounds that 'it is a fundamental conviction of the Christian faith that wherever salvation occurs - wherever the true aim of life <u>is</u> attained - it is always through the grace of Jesus Christ'. Yet proponents want to assert more, illegitimately, in his opinion:

> They want to argue that members of other religious communities can attain salvation through the exercise of their own religions. It is this additional claim that provokes the critique of inclusivism basic to the argument of this book. (DiNoia, 1992:166)

DiNoia's criticism of this aspect of inclusivism arises from his conviction that:

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[270]In Hick's sense, recorded earlier in this section, that 'each of the great world faiths sees ordinary human life as being defective or unsatisfactory, and as standing in contrast to a limitlessly better state in a right relationship to, or within, the ultimate divine Reality of which they speak' (Hick, 1994:12f.).

> Christian confidence in the salvation of other religious people is logically independent of judgments about the aims of life commended by their communities. A blanket affirmation that other religions aim at salvation (in some way or other) is not required to sustain Christian confidence in the availability of salvation to non-Christians. (DiNoia, 1992:95)

It could be argued that DiNoia's position is not radical enough. He is right to emphasise that the theme of salvation is muted or unimportant in other faiths. But he overemphasises the importance of the theme of salvation in Christianity.[271]

Salvation, as many theologians describe it, is an overused and inexact term. It is often summarised along the following lines, which is indebted to a model suggested by Lesslie Newbigin. God's grace is over all, which every human discerns in some measure. But evil haunts human hearts and structures, so God elects a people, Israel, and then a person, Jesus, to overcome it. The triumph of Jesus over death provides the hope that God will raise humans to eternal life. He does so through a chosen people, the church, which 'is the sign and first fruit of God's purpose to save all'. However, all will finally be judged by God, and the results of that verdict will bring surprises. It is therefore important for everyone to consider his or her own

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[271]Perhaps he does so, mindful of the comment by David Tracy that 'The new question is to find a way to formulate a Christian theological pluralism in such a manner that a genuinely new answer may be forthcoming without abandoning Christian identity' (quoted in DiNoia, 1992:180). Just so; yet it may be possible in dialogue with other faiths to come to a more adequate formulation than one centred on soteriology.

position, rather than that of others (in Wainwright, 1989:331ff.)

Actually, this interpretation is based only upon a particular interpretation of part of the biblical material. In English translations of the Old Testament, salvation is used to translate different Hebrew words. One of the basic root words (found as *niph'al* and *hiph'il*) has among its meanings, 'to be broad', 'to enlarge' or 'to grow spacious'. Therefore, 'deliverance', 'liberation' or some other word may often translate particular contexts better than 'salvation' or its cognate terms. Certainly, modern Judaism has not made much of salvation, although a sense of needing deliverance has remained integral to its self-identity. It could be that this is in reaction to Christian usage of Old Testament material, or because the *tanakh* functions differently for them, or because many Jews recognise that 'salvation language' is just one among many means of describing God's way in the world. In the New Testament, although salvation language is meaningful, it is not overwhelmingly important, and different writers interpret it in various ways. The word *soter*, meaning 'saviour', is used eight times of God (including six occurrences in the Pastoral epistles). It is also used sixteen times of Jesus, mostly in the later books. In the gospels, there is just one reference in John's gospel (4:42) and two in Luke's (1:47; 2:11).[272]

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[272]See the article by Alan Richardson on 'Salvation, Savior' in Buttrick, 1962: esp.168-171.

Most soteriological language of the New Testament does not point forward to the ideological interpretation outlined above. For example, that notable verse, Acts 4:12 is not chiefly interesting for its verdict about the fate of all humankind. Indeed, it is possible to overstate its relevance to contemporary inter-faith implications. It is about the healing of a lame man by Peter, and could be translated: 'and there is healing -*soteria*- in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be healed-*sothenai*'. Geoffrey Lampe has written that 'these words should be read in the proper context of Luke's reconstruction of the anti-Jewish polemic of the early church and not generalized beyond that context' (Lampe, 1977:31).[273] At any rate, this passage suggests that some students of the Bible interpret its salvation language too narrowly, and in insufficiently nuanced ways.[274]

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[273]I have written that:

> Acts 4v12, though directed to people who shared a common Jewish tradition about God's dealings with his world, and primarily about healing and not salvation in all its fullness, implicitly raises the question of the unique authority of Jesus. This can be seen by reading Acts 3-4v22 alongside Acts 14vv8-18, which describes how Barnabas and Paul were called Zeus and Hermes when they healed the cripple at Lystra... Luke intends a deliberate parallel with the earlier miracle, which was also that of healing a cripple. The point of the second account is that the miracle was done by a servant of Jesus, and that Zeus and Hermes have no real power to heal. (Forward, 1985:9)

[274]See Cracknell, 1986:107ff. for an interpretation of this verse which prevents it from being treated 'as a conversation-stopper or deterrent to dialogue'.

For pluralists, pluralism has come to mean that variety not only exists, but is to be affirmed. That may be so, but it has to be argued for. For example, to take Parrinder's rather extreme example, it would be difficult to contend on ethical grounds that the Aztecs' religion is as acceptable or valid as most Buddhists'. On the other hand, both exclusivists and inclusivists play down the importance of 'otherness', though in different ways. It would be better to define pluralism, not ideologically but simply as religious diversity, rather than accepting, rejecting or incorporating it into an overt and sometimes rather rigid Christian framework, as many pluralists, exclusivists and inclusivists variously do. It would then be possible (for example, in ethical matters) to reflect on what aspects of different faiths build up life in our contemporary global society, and what do not.

The problem of 'the other', particularly of religious diversity, needs different starting points than soteriology; arguably, two. The first starting point must be an attempt to view each religion on its own terms rather than through a pair of Christian spectacles.[275] Each religion has its own ethos, internal diversities, aims and means to those aims. These profoundly affect the beliefs and practices of their devotees, who will never be adequately understood by those who do not seek to view them as they

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[275]See my article 'Through Another's Eyes: A Christian vision of God in a world of religions', in Rodd, 1990:235-245.

see themselves. Outsiders must not only recognise difference, but struggle to discern how each believer values his or her faith and seeks to live it out. Theologians from another religion may, from their own perspective, dislike what they see, but they must at least attempt to understand and empathise.

Parrinder is not completely successful in letting the other be other. Perhaps the best example of this that we have discussed has been his depiction of the Buddha himself or saviour-type figures in Buddhism.[276] In a symposium for E.O. James' 75th birthday, to which Parrinder contributed an article, the Buddhist scholar Edward Conze (d.1979) wrote a paper, showing how difficult it is to make meaningful comparisons between apparently similar terms in another religion's sacred languages and one's own. When William Carey and others translated the New Testament into Sanskrit in 1808, they used *trana* for 'salvation' and *tratur* for 'saviour', the root being *trai*, to protect. Yet Buddhist terminology has no exact equivalent to the Christian conception of a saviour; certainly *tratur* is never used to translate any of Buddhism's 'saviour-type' figures. Conze contended that Buddhist beliefs about such figures are in many ways:

> so similar to Christian views that missionaries have often seen them as a counterfeit gospel deliberately created by the Devil to deceive the faithful. At the same time, when the exact words of the originals are faithfully rendered into English it becomes obvious

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[276]See Chapter 7.1.

> that there are no precise equivalents to key terms; that the finer shades of meaning and the emotional flavours and overtones differ throughout, that much of this teaching must seem strange to Christians and that in fact the logic behind it is at variance with all the basic presuppositions of Christianity.[277] (in Brandon, 1963:67f.)

The force of Conze's argument is that when people of faith insist on exporting the words and terms by which they understand their own religion, they are liable seriously to misunderstand another's faith. Out of a natural desire to understand what they do not know solely from the basis of what they do, they may translate a word or a concept in another person's religious vocabulary by one that is in their own, which has certain superficial similarities but in fact scans a different universe of meaning.

Conze believed that it was not just doctrinal formulations which divided the religions, but even the ideal sort of person each strived after. He wrote that:

> I once read through a collection of the lives of Roman Catholic saints, and there was not one of whom a Buddhist could fully approve. This does not mean that they were unworthy people, but that they were bad Buddhists, though good Christians. (in Brandon, 1963:80)[278]

One result of this (which Conze was not intent upon exploring in detail) is that the other's difference can be interpreted as implying its inferiority. For example,

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[277]Conze's argument therefore illustrates the problems of language and translation in cross-cultural discourse that are discussed in section 3 of this chapter.

[278]DiNoia refers to this passage in 1992:34.

because *soter* is an important word and concept in the New Testament and developed Christian theology whilst *tratur* is not equivalently important in Buddhist teachings, Christians can easily draw the deduction that it is Buddhism's failure as a religion, consequent upon the teachings of the Buddha himself, that it does not save its followers out of the human predicament. This is to judge a religion negatively, in advance of any serious attempt to understand its abiding and central concerns. If such Christians were to examine Buddhist teaching on its own terms, they would discover that it describes, very satisfactorily for its adherents, the human predicament, but that it offers different solutions to it than Christian ones.

Parrinder is not such a Christian, but he is misled by equivalences between the Buddha and other saviour-type figures in Buddhism, and Jesus. Sometimes, too, he falls into the trap of believing that an English word or concept found in one religion has the same range of meanings elsewhere, which leads him to detect superficial or even misleading resemblances where none exist.[279]

Letting other religions be other, rather than seeing them through a pair of Christian spectacles, need not lead to an indifference towards difference. Too often, Parrinder, like many participants of all shades of opinion in the modern

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[279]See, for another example than those offered in this chapter, the discussion on the word 'saint' between Muslims and Christians in Chapter 6.3.

soteriological discussion, refracts other religions through the prism of Christian faith before he has listened to what they reveal of themselves. Although he is widely read in many faiths, the impression is that he applies his Christian convictions to the evidence as he reads about it. It might be more stimulating if he suspended judgement, stood back from the material that he knows, and applied his Christian interpretation at a later stage in the process of acquiring knowledge. For example, if he had listened more empathetically[280] to what Muslims believe to be important, he might have focused on, for example, humans as God's servants or vicegerents, as a more profitable point of comparison and contrast than Jesus. Similarly, the humanistic aspirations of Buddhism, which he undermines by stressing the superhuman role of the Buddha, might be for many Buddhists precisely the most creative point of dialogue with Christians (and others), not least given Parrinder's conviction in Avatar and Incarnation that the humanity of Jesus is a more significant focus than his divinity for a Christian discussion with Hindus. Parrinder has a deep curiosity and wide knowledge about other faiths, and interprets them sympathetically. Often, however, he has less empathy with them than sympathy for them; he does not quite see through another's eyes.

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[280]For problems with the word 'empathy', yet for a defence of its usage in inter-faith relations, see section 3 of this chapter.

The second starting point from which theologians must proceed to assess religious pluralism is an admission of the necessity of choice. To assess other faiths and their followers from a soteriological standpoint is to make a choice, not to comply with a necessity. Given the biblical evidence and the historical freight which burdens much salvation-language, it is unlikely to be the most fruitful choice.

It also fails to take seriously scripture's diverse reflections on important topics. For example, in the Old Testament, the issue of religious pluralism, which is often bound up with racial difference, is handled in different ways. Moses declared that no Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord, down to the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3). However, the author of the book of Ruth portrays her as a Moabitess who is accepted in Israel; she becomes the ancestress of David, Israel's greatest king. Upon the return of Jews from exile, Ezra and Nehemiah pursued, in varying degree, a policy of apartheid. Nehemiah made Jewish men take an oath that neither they nor their children would intermarry with foreigners (Nehemiah 13:25). Ezra went further. After a large group of Israelites confessed to him that they had broken faith with God by marrying foreign women, they agreed to send them and their children, who were, of course, half-Jewish, away (Ezra 10:3). These figures illustrate the fact that the Christian scriptures offer different and often irreconcilable solutions to religious pluralism.

Theologians reflect and write out of a reading of scripture, tradition and experience which implies choice. Some act as if the choices they have made are more self-evidently true than, in reality, they are. For example, Hans Küng has offered Christian commentary on Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese faith, and written more extensively about Judaism[281], with major works to follow on Islam and other religions too. His works show a breadth of knowledge and insight that are truly remarkable. Yet he displays a tendency to systematise and thus over-simplify the manifold complexities of human experience[282]: an example is his contention that a third great river system is to be found in China, based on wisdom, not Semitic prophecy or Indian mysticism (Küng, 1993:xii ff.). Küng is a very different figure from Parrinder; not least in the fact that he lacks Parrinder's rich experiential knowledge of other faiths and cultures. Certainly, Parrinder's judgements

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[281]Küng, H. et al. (1993 edn.), Christianity and the World Religions, London, SCM; Küng H. and Ching, J. (1993 edn.), Christianity and Chinese Religions, London, SCM; Küng, H. (1992 edn.), Judaism, London SCM.

[282]Note Rabbi Michael Hilton's searching criticism of Küng's book on Judaism, that:

> Despite the vast scale of this book, Küng clearly has a preconception that ideas could only have proceeded from Judaism to Christianity, not *vice versa*. For example, in his section entitled 'Why was there no Jewish reformation?', Küng considers only developments in Judaism which preceded the Reformation in Christianity, even though logic dictates that the reverse would be far more likely - a minority group would be much more likely to be influenced by the surrounding majority culture than the other way around. There has of course been a Reformation in Judaism... in the nineteenth century. (Hilton, 1994:3)

about other faiths are sometimes more perceptive than Küng's. For example, he has noted that Zaehner's distinction of two different approaches among the world's religions, Semitic and Indian 'is a broad generalization and there are obvious exceptions' (Parrinder, 1976d:70). However, both seem more keen to offer Christian comments about the world's religions than first to understand them as their believers do.

What of Jesus's attitude towards people of other faiths? By and large, his ministry was intra-faith. His choices from within his own Jewish tradition of faith differed significantly from that of other Jewish teachers, including Pharisees and Sadducees, and led him into serious disagreement with them. Nevertheless, the extent of that conflict was probably not as much as the gospels suggest. To some extent, the evangelists reflect back onto Jesus's ministry the antagonism between Jews and emerging Christian groups towards the end of the first century.[283] The beliefs and practices that bound together all Jews in the first century, including Jesus, were much greater than those which divided them.[284]

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[283]See, *inter alia*, the article by Jack Dean Kingsbury, 'The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel: a Literary-Critical Study' in Stanton, 1995:179-197.

[284]'Christianity, growing up within Judaism, took for granted the major tenets of the Jewish faith - its monotheism, its belief in God as Creator, and Lord of history; its conviction that God had revealed himself to Moses and the prophets, and that the scriptures were the witness to this revelation': Hooker, 1986:16.

Jesus was primarily interested in opening up for people trust in a creative, providential and parenting God. On the relatively rare occasions when he came into contact with gentiles, the element of faith or trust remained, for him, of paramount importance. For example, when faced with the faith of the centurion who besought him to heal his servant, he was astonished, and remarked that he had never before encountered such faith, not even in Israel (Matthew 8: 5-13; Luke 7: 1-10). This comment was not Jesus's contribution to the history of anti-semitism (the emphasis in the comparison was on the woman's faith, not the Jews' lack of it), though Matthew takes the opportunity of this story to reflect his community's antagonism with other Jewish groups half a century later (Stanton, 1995:19f., 189). Rather, to some extent, Jesus shared the negative and often ill-informed attitude of Jews of his day towards gentile religion, and his words show his amazement that faith could be found in that unexpected place. His healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman illustrates this (Matthew 15: 21-28; Mark 7: 24-30). He first said that his mission was only to Israel, and was then provoked into saying that it is not right to throw the children's bread to dogs. But he was so impressed by the woman's witty and hopeful response that, because of her great faith, he cured her daughter.[285]

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[285] 'If non-Jews believed with a faith like that of this woman, access [to the life of the Kingdom] would not be denied them': Hill, 1972:253.

What does Jesus's emphasis upon faith in God, in his meetings with Jews and others alike, suggest to contemporary Christians? The chief impression is that the language of soteriology does not quite fit. Certainly, any narrow view that 'Jesus saves' seems a banal reflection upon what is going on in these encounters. To be sure, Jesus enables faith in God to have its reward, but he is not, in these particular stories, its focus. Neither is the destination of humankind at issue, nor the acceptability of other religious traditions; but rather God's faithfulness towards those who, in their need, turn to him.

Parrinder, true to his Methodist roots, believes that God's salvation is universal;[286] though centred in Christ, salvation is found in other faiths. His most detailed assessment is in the article, 'The Salvation of other Men' (1973). This was written shortly after Avatar and Incarnation and summarises and extends the argument found there about the importance of human embodiments of divine grace. He argues that:

> Faith not only in the centrality but in the supremacy or uniqueness of the saviour seems to be a characteristic of many if not all religions, a fundamental and recurring feature of religious phenomenology, from Yahweh to Mao... The claim to the universality of the salvation offered by a religion may lead it not only to emphasise the supremacy or uniqueness of the saviour but also to encourage an exclusive attitude towards followers of other religions. This may conflict with universalism, and 'salvation for all' is usually taken to mean 'only if

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[286]See Chapter 2.5.

> they believe in the approved fashion'. (Parrinder, 1973c:193, 196)[287]

Parrinder notes that in Romans 9-11, Paul envisages the eventual salvation of the Jews and that his Adam christology of 1 Corinthians 15:22ff. points towards universal salvation. He recognises that 'in many later centuries Christians seem to have forgotten that truth, wherever it is found, must come from God'. He applauds the recovery of that recognition by the second Vatican Council (Parrinder, 1973c:197).

He recognises that many Christians have more difficulty with specific saviours, such as Muhammad and Krishna, and with other believers' views of Jesus. This is because 'it is a fundamental feature of belief in the Saviour that he is supreme and even unique' (Parrinder, 1973c:202). Yet despite the jealousies of all religions about their schemes of salvation and saviours, Parrinder claims that:

> Religions are closer together than may appear on the surface. Indeed, to recognise the fervour and sincerity of belief in salvation within a particular religion, and in its object of devotion, may bring a

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[287]Although Parrinder reveals no detailed knowledge of the writings of Karl Rahner, the German Jesuit has also written of 'saviour figures'. Specifically, he observed that there is no reason:

> to write them off contemptuously, as if they stood in such contrast to Jesus, as the eschatological, unsurpassable saviour, that they can only be judged negatively. Saviour figures in the history of religion can certainly only be viewed as signs that - since man is always and everywhere moved by the Spirit - he gazes in anticipation towards that event in which his absolute hope becomes historically irreversible and is manifested as such. (Rahner, vol 17, 1981:50)

> better appreciation of religion in general than is obtainable by assuming that all schemes of salvation are illusory. (Parrinder, 1973c:202)

Indeed, Parrinder ends his article by suggesting that:

> one who believes in salvation for himself ought to be able most easily to accept that other people also find it essential, and the task of religious understanding is to discover the different ways in which salvation and the saviour are conceived. Within each religion there are doctrines which have been heavily marked by local concepts of theology, philosophy, law and sacrifice, but beneath them are wider concepts which express the essence of religion itself. Therefore the salvation of other men can be recognised as a universal, operating within particular contexts, and understood as not exceptional but normal. (Parrinder, 1973c:203)

This argument about the essence of religion and the accidents of doctrine and other phenomena of religion is fascinating but undeveloped. Moreover, it is belied by much of his writing in which he candidly assesses other religions from a Christian theological perspective; as in this article where he asserts that:

> We are faced, then, with the continued coexistence of different schemes of salvation and different saviours, worshipped under their particular names, though it may be recognised that God, or Christ, who is the Saviour of all and in all is at work in each of them in varying degrees. (Parrinder, 1973c:202)

However, Parrinder rejoices in the fact that:

> the salvation of other men outside the visible church and with no conscious knowledge of Christian soteriology can now be taken as accepted by eminent Roman Catholic and many Protestant teachers, developing the teachings of Paul. (Parrinder, 1973c:200f.)

One reason why Parrinder has not contributed much to the more recent debate about inclusivism, exclusivism and pluralism, may simply be that, in his judgement, it raises issues that have been settled. His roots as a Methodist incline him to the conviction that salvation is for all and that God's grace is universal. These roots have also instilled in him a recognition that it is through Christ that God's love is most clearly demonstrated, the best human embodiment of divine grace. Before we explore his christology a little further than acknowledging his commitment to Jesus as the *logos*,[288] we must question its primary importance in Christian life and faith.

8.2 Christology.

Michael Barnes writes that his book, Religions in Conversation, 'has not started with christology or soteriology precisely because it is unclear what the *Christian* meaning of other religions can possibly be'. He argues that what is needed is not a theology *for* dialogue, but a theology *of* dialogue. He himself has:

> worked... from the inter-faith conversation to theology, not out of any perverse desire to be different but in the conviction that a contemporary theology of religions cannot simply be based on the sort of *a priori* Christian principles which underlie traditional christocentric theology, the so-called exclusivist and inclusivist paradigms. (Barnes, 1989:135)

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[288]See Chapter 2.6.

In his view, Christian theologians must 'recognize two conversations: with the tradition and with the other' (Barnes, 1989:137). He suggests that a Spirit-centred theology could promote this theology in dialogue. This would safeguard the meaning of Christ for Christians, and indicate the mystery of God at work in the world. Such a theology emphasises the '*single process of divine activity in the world*' (Barnes, 1989:143).

Certainly, a Spirit-based theology would emphasise the many ways God encounters people in the Old and New Testaments, and in all creation (Barnes, 1989:143). Yet, although it does justice to Christian tradition, it could seriously mislead some other dialogue partners unless it were very carefully explained. For example, in Islam the Spirit of God is usually seen as Jibril (or Gabriel), who conveys the Quran to Muhammad in piecemeal fashion over a period of about 22 years.[289] Jesus himself is possibly described in the Quran as a Spirit from God (4:169; Parrinder, 1976b:49f.); yet he is often a divisive figure between Muslims and Christians.[290]

Similarly, a trinitarian theology of religions, such as D'Costa has suggested in his article 'Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality',[291] does justice to the centre of

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[289]See the article on 'Djabrail' in Gibb and Kramers, 1974:79f..

[290]See Chapter 6.4.

[291]In D'Costa, 1990:16-29.

Christian faith, but often leads to misunderstandings in dialogue with (among others) Muslims, who frequently misconstrue Christian trinitarianism as tri-theism in advance of any discussions about the nature and will of God (Parrinder, 1976b:133-141). Thus, there seems to be a tension between a theology *for* dialogue which does justice to cardinal Christian convictions, and a theology which appreciates the ways in which others will hear the claims that are made by Christians. Barnes' theology *of* dialogue does not quite achieve this appreciative perspective.

DiNoia points to a possible way out of this impasse. He commends a theology *in* dialogue (DiNoia, 1992:111). My conviction is that such a theology would be inclusivist in the specific sense that Christians would see Christ as the focus of God's universal grace.[292] Yet it must also bear in mind the beliefs, structures and presuppositions of the dialogue partner.

Perhaps theologians of religion could profitably explore Christian relations with particular faiths, rather than construct a theology for all of them. For example, Barnes' suggestion of a Spirit-centred theology arises out of his particular interest in Buddhism, but is less helpful, or at least creates more problems, in furthering dialogue with Muslims. The British Churches have begun to recognise the necessity to converse with specific religions, rather than

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[292]For an 18th century Methodist perspective on this, which Parrinder has instinctively and sometimes explicitly inherited, see Chapter 2.5 and 2.6.

to assume that the same practical and even theoretical issues are the concern of all faiths.[293]

For Parrinder, christology (not pneumatology, not even soteriology) has been at the centre of an understanding of other faiths. Although, in his very earliest article, he made use of the distinction between general and special revelation (Parrinder, 1939:393), indicating that Christ has a 'special' role to play, he has rarely alluded to that role in terms of fulfilment. In his Avatar and Incarnation (1970), he refers only once and in a depreciatory way to John Nicol Farquhar's book The Crown of Hinduism (1913):

> the famous missionary J. N. Farquhar [1861-1929] wrote of Christianity as 'the Crown of Hinduism', and he set a pattern for missionary thought which unfortunately too often assumed that if the Crown was known it was absolved from the study of Hinduism in its own right. (Parrinder, 1970a:266)

Parrinder's basic point explains why he had little time for any fulfilment theory or variation upon it: although a devout Christian who believed in the necessity of Christ for everyone, he has also been interested in religions for their own sake, even if he has sometimes conformed them to Christian categories.

Farquhar was not a clear writer. Sometimes he presented Christianity as the crown of Hinduism; at other times it was Christ. Often, he conflated the two in a very unhelpful

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[293]The Church of Scotland has a particular interest in relations with Jews. The United Reformed Church has also made links with Jewish scholars, but also with Sikhs.

and confusing way: he wrote that 'in setting forth Christianity as the Crown of Hinduism, we shall restrict ourselves to Christ himself' (Farquhar, 1913:64).[294] He probably emphasised the importance of Christianity as an institution because of his many years serving the Indian YMCA (1902-23), from 1912 as its literature secretary (Sharpe, 1975:152). He spent part of each year back in England, writing; this may explain the curiously non-contextual feel to The Crown of Hinduism, no doubt a major reason why Parrinder had little sympathy with his position.

Although Farquhar's book made the fulfilment theory popular in relation to Christianity and other religions, he was not the first or best writer to raise it. A more distinguished figure was Thomas Ebenezer Slater (1840-1912), who as early as 1876 wrote that 'the aspect in which I would set Christianity before you is not an aspect of antagonism but of consummation'. In his book The Philosophy of Missions (1882:112) he wrote that 'all other religions wait for their fulfilment in Christianity' (Cracknell, 1995:109, 115). Thus, Parrinder was mistaken in observing that Farquhar 'set a pattern for missionary thought'; it was an older, richer and subtler tradition than he supposed.[295]

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[294]Gavin D'Costa expresses the view that Farquhar's book 'gave forceful and clear expression to the view that Christ (and not Christianity) was the fulfilment and crown of Hinduism': D'Costa, 1987:18. Actually, Farquhar was less clear than D'Costa and many writers have claimed.

[295]Parrinder makes another reference to Farquhar in his article 'The salvation of other men', when he writes that The Crown of Hinduism 'is taken to regard all other religions as Old Testaments, at best, preparing the way for

However, Parrinder never explored this theological position with much thoroughness.

In reality, it is one way of updating the age-old doctrine of the finality of Christ to be relevant to a pluralist context. In dismissing it, Parrinder failed to ask whether the charge he made that it rendered study of other faiths unnecessary could not also be applied to other versions of Christ's finality, including his own commitment to Jesus as the human embodiment of the divine *logos*.

In July 1967, Parrinder took part in a symposium at Somerville College, Oxford, on the theme Christ for Us Today. He discussed 'The Place of Jesus Christ in World Religions', particularly in Islam and Hinduism. In it he upheld the uniqueness of Christ. But where did this uniqueness lie? He noted that other religions have raised the issue of whether religious leaders can be divine, so he did not especially see Christ's uniqueness in his divinity. Nor did he locate it in his sinlessness, since other religions also have their sinless figures. Nor, in his estimation, can Jesus be assumed to be the religious founder most bathed in the light of history (Parrinder, 1968b:26f.). Rather, with a certain hesitancy, Parrinder suggested that Jesus had a moral advantage over other claimants:

> Much is made today of the active compassion of the Buddha, though he was more of a teacher than a healer

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Christ but now being abolished.' (in Parrinder, 1973c:199)

> or social reformer. The active compassion of Jesus is world famous, and culminating in the Cross it gives a manifestation of the love of God that is indeed unique... In these good works the indirect influence of Christ is to be seen, probably far more widespread than direct conversions to the Christian religion, and imitated in some degree in other cultures in a sincere flattery. (Parrinder, 1968b:27)

Nevertheless, the picture of Jesus as simply a moral figure will not do. Parrinder argued that:

> the history of religion has shown that men need an object for devotion, great and noble, awe-inspiring and compassionate, one that they can understand, one who speaks and reveals, an incarnate Lord. (Parrinder, 1968b:28)

He wrote that:

> There is no doubt that modern christology needs re-shaping and re-presenting to the world. Much of it is unintelligible, conceived in the categories of Jewish and Greek thought of the early centuries that are no longer relevant. Yet in re-formulation the religious content of Christology must not be so emptied away that nothing remains for devotion and faith to cling to... No man, no school of theologians, perhaps no generation can hope to present a perfect christology, but neither must the attempt be neglected... (Parrinder, 1968b:28)

These reflections were to be fleshed out but not refined in his Avatar and Incarnation (1970), where Jesus's superiority to other embodiments of human aspirations and divine grace, especially the Hindu avatar concept, formed the subject matter of the book.[296]

The details or even the substance of Parrinder's christological reflections can certainly be faulted. For

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[296]See Chapter 7.4.

example, comparing saviour-type figures may be less valuable than Parrinder maintains. Barnes has questioned whether it is appropriate to begin 'with a comparison of Christ and Krishna as equally valid symbols of God's revelation (for they must of course differ in many respects)' (Barnes, 1989:143).[297]

One specific problem faced by theologians studying the implications of religious diversity for christology is the use of scripture. For example, Kraemer, committed as he is to 'Biblical realism', takes certain verses very seriously indeed, not least John 14:6. So he writes that 'God has revealed *the* Way and *the* Truth and *the* Life in Jesus Christ and wills this to be known throughout the world' (Kraemer, 1938:101). This un-nuanced, literalist reading of scripture, establishes his critique of religions: in the light of this revelation 'all religious life, the lofty and degraded, appear to be under the divine judgement, because it is *misdirected*' (Kraemer, 1938:136). Yet this verse, if interpreted in the light of an inclusive reading of John 1:9, is capable of a very different interpretation, stressing God's christ-like presence among other faiths, affirming them in a positive sense.[298]

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[297]Barnes was not specifically criticising Parrinder, who is not guilty of seeing both figures as equally valid, and does recognise important differences between them. However, the point is that such comparisons may inappropriately focus the debate on issues of secondary importance.

[298]For example, Archbishop Temple's famous exegesis of John 1:9, noted in Chapter 2.6 and in the Conclusion.

Other exclusivists also show a partial reading of the biblical evidence. For example, Martin Goldsmith's assertion that 'we know that in all cases salvation can only come on the grounds of the atoning death of Jesus Christ' (Goldsmith, 1989:138), even though it is followed by a recognition that the New Testament evidence is that in the final judgement, God 'will doubtless surprise many humble sinners by his saving grace', flies in the face of the teaching of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). There the father's love cannot adequately be expressed in such a way, where the cross is not so much the necessary means of expressing the atonement as the supreme illustration of God's universal love. Luke has no such atonement theory of the cross, not because he was faulty at this point, but because he saw it not as an isolated event, but as a part of the pattern of God's amazing grace towards humankind.[299] Goldsmith's book shows the great difficulty of distinguishing interpretations of the biblical material from reading back into it the often narrow and particular perspectives of later theologians.

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[299]There has been much discussion as to whether the parable concentrates on the father's love or the son's repentance. C.F. Evans describes these two positions, but prefers a third. He interprets the story as a *'peripeteia*; that is, a sudden change from an extremity of misfortune and misery to its opposite' (Evans, 1990:587-594). In this context, verses 17-20 may be less about the son's genuine sorrow than his willingness to take the necessary steps to transform his situation.
At any rate, some scholars have argued that, in Luke 'there is no trace of any Passion mysticism, nor is any direct soteriological significance drawn from Jesus' suffering or death. There is no suggestion of a connection with the forgiveness of sins': Conzelmann, 1960:201.

It is not just exclusivists whose use of scripture is partial. John Hick, in his assessment of the role of Jesus for Christians, reveals a particular and incomplete reading of biblical evidence about him. For some time, he has held that the view 'that *God* has been encountered through Jesus is communicated mythologically by saying that he was God the Son incarnate' (eg Hick, 1993a:172). In a recent work, The Metaphor of God Incarnate (1993), he develops the theme of christology. He argues that traditional Christian faith holds that Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate, who became a man, died for the sins of the world, and founded a church. Hick argues that Jesus did not teach this, and that credal statements about the two natures of Christ are incoherent. Moreover, the doctrine of the incarnation has been used to justify and perpetrate great evils, including anti-semitism, the oppression of women by men, and deep arrogance and hostility towards other religions. For Hick, Jesus 'embodied a human love which is a reflection of the divine love' (Hick, 1993b:ix). He proposes a faith 'which takes Jesus as our supreme (but not necessarily only) spiritual guide ... and sees Christianity as one authentic context of salvation/liberation amongst others... interacting in mutually creative ways with the other great paths' (Hick, 1993b:162f.).

Although he stated an intention to write in 'a less stark and more nuanced way' (Hick, 1993b:3) than hitherto, Hick's is a very particular interpretation of Christian teaching about Jesus and of much recent work about the New

Testament. It is possible to use the tools of modern scholarship and still ask of Jesus, 'what manner of man is this?', so as to retain more satisfactorily his earliest followers' sense of wonder and mystery at what God had wrought in their midst and in their lives. C.F.D. Moule views:

> all the various estimates of Jesus reflected in the New Testament as, in essence, only attempts to describe what was already there from the beginning... They represent various stages in the development of perception, but they do not represent the accretion of any alien factors that were not inherent from the beginning. (Moule, 1977:2f.)

Moule's interpretation has proved controversial, but the fact is that Jesus was so remarkable a figure as to draw to himself, shortly after his life and arguably during it, the most elevated of assessments by those who followed his way. Hick's interpretation underplays that impact by his excessive christological reductionism. Although it is important to underscore his concern that incarnational theology has been used by Christians to victimise others, it remains, for good or ill, distinctive of Christian faith, and capable of greater nuances than he allows.

Moreover, the portrayal of Jesus in The Metaphor of God Incarnate has many resonances with quranic and other developed Muslim views of Jesus. Yet the possibilities of dialogue with Muslims on the basis of such a depiction of Jesus are not developed by Hick, nor even mentioned. Arguably, then, Hick's is a primarily a theology *for* rather than *of* or *in* dialogue.

The problems of biblical interpretation, not least of Jesus, have been particularly acute in the 'Christian' West since the rise of biblical criticism. They have been bound up with a particular form of discourse and the creation and elaboration of a specific form of knowledge, often applied uncritically upon other cultures, without a dialogue which considers alternative modes of discourse more appropriate to the other's ways of believing and knowing. This issue will be addressed in the next section.

8.3 Missiology.

Since Jesus Christ is central to a Christian understanding of God, this raises the issue of missiology: Christians have often regarded themselves as 'sent' by God to tell others of Jesus's interpretation of ultimate reality. Yet Parrinder hardly raises missiological questions at all. However, one chapter in Encountering World Religions is called 'Is there a mission?', where Parrinder ponders whether the Christian missionary enterprise should be restricted:

> Certainly not addressed to Jews, probably not to Muslims, perhaps not to Buddhists and theistic Hindus, and efforts reserved for idolaters and illiterates... But it seems unlikely that any of the three great missionary religions, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, would publicly abandon their long-held international aims. (Parrinder, 1987a:205)

He records that:

> The approval that is often given to medical missions, but withheld from propagandist work, indicates a deep feeling that the faith is to be expressed by service

> and that a little help is worth more than sterile debate. (Parrinder, 1987a:205)

Such a passage might have, but has not, led him to a concept of mission appropriate for a post-imperial, global civilisation. It ought to be both possible and desirable to emphasise a christology free from any soteriological connection which simply imposes Christian meaning upon the other without listening to its own concerns. If Jesus came to bring the kingly rule of God, then love, joy, peace, truth and other Christian virtues (which are not just Christian) could be acknowledged and rejoiced in when encountered elsewhere. Some Christian scholars would simply want to affirm that people of other faiths 'richly participate in the grace of God and in his bounty', and leaves matters there (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in Stockwell, 1988:372). Others, including, in a modest way, Parrinder himself, would see a place for evangelism and conversion, on the grounds that a Christian's judgement about the universal grace of God is made on the basis of his revelation in Jesus Christ, faith in whom is (in the words of John Wesley)[300] an 'unspeakable blessing' additional to the revelation of ultimate reality non-Christians experience in their own faiths.

Yet any discussion of Christian mission in the contemporary world is fraught with difficulties. In a post-colonial situation, Western political control has been replaced by

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[300]See Chapter 2.6.

its economic power (particularly that of the U.S.A.) over much of the globe.[301] Much Western self-understanding is based upon myths that are taken as self-evidently true, and yet are destructive of other peoples, cultures and religions. For example, the worst aspects of 'orientalism' not only serve to promote Western 'civilisation' by contrasting it favourably with oriental, particularly Islamic, beliefs and societies, but also assume that Western scholars interpret the other 'cultures' more satisfactorily than they understand themselves.[302] Little wonder, therefore, that many non-Western scholars appropriate Western scholarship without due acknowledgement, and that more radical voices repudiate many of the aims and achievements of such erudition altogether.[303] Indeed, the very concept of a global consciousness is regarded with suspicion by those who have suffered its totalitarian claims.

In his article, 'A "Politics of Speech"', Kenneth Surin attempts 'to understand the understandings of Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, "the world religions," and so forth, that are *produced* and *reproduced* in the texts of Kraemer, Rahner, Hick and Cantwell Smith' (in D'Costa, 1990:193). The subtitle of his paper, 'Religious Pluralism in the Age

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[301]A point forcefully made by Kenneth Surin in D'Costa, 1990:194f..

[302]See Chapter 6.1.

[303]An example is the attitude of Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Okot P'Bitek and other scholars of African primal faiths towards Parrinder's writings in this area.

of the McDonald's Hamburger', suggests his scepticism that global theologies reproduced by Western scholars are entirely convincing. He contends that:

> The periodizations of these thinkers... betoken a thoroughly Eurocentric or First World perspective on their parts: only someone who is not sufficiently aware of the always particular "location" from which he or she theorizes can celebrate the new "global city" and propound a world or global theology in... [an] apparently unreflective way: impoverished peasants in Kedah in Malaysia find it well-nigh impossible to accept that they and a wealthy landowner *from their own village* are situated in the same moral or social location, and yet we are urged by Cantwell Smith and Co. to believe that such Malay peasants, their landlord and even the Duke of Westminster or the Hunt brothers inhabit the same global city or share a common human history.
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> The global space of the discourses of "religious pluralism" (Cantwell Smith), "inclusivism" (Rahner), and "liberal exclusivism" (the later Kraemer), effectively incorporates, and therefore dissolves, the localized and oppositional "spaces" of people like peasants in Malaysia. Local attachments, with their always specific histories and politics, are displaced and dispersed by a global and "globalizing" topography as the local is subsumed under the regime of the universal.
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> The project that has been called the "rise and dominance of the West" has been metamorphosed, or been "sublated," into a "new" project, that of "the rise and dominance of the global." (in D'Costa, 1990:195f.)

Relatively recently, George Lindbeck has written of the importance of language for the nature of doctrine and its regulative function within particular faith communities,[304]

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[304]In his book, The Nature of Doctrine - Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age, Lindbeck identifies three current theological theories of religion and doctrine: the 'cognitive-propositional' stresses the cognitive aspects of religion, regarding doctrines as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities; the 'experiential-expressive' underlines doctrine as noninformative symbols of existential orientations; and the third, 'cultural-linguistic', which he favours, attempts to see both the other approaches as valid. It does so by

but Surin refers to a book by V.A. Voloshinov[305] to illustrate a far more radical appraisal of the problems of Western discourse about 'the other'. Surin notes two difficulties of language raised by Voloshinov for the understanding of inter-religious dialogue:

> The first is his claim that since meaning is contextual, "there are as many meanings of a word as there are contexts of its usage" (p.79). The second is his contention that speech is ineluctably dialogical because utterances are always the product of specific relationships between speakers and listeners, addressers and addressees. These two emphases merge in Voloshinov's insistence that "to understand another person's utterance means to orient oneself with respect to it, to find the proper place for it in the corresponding context. For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words" (p.102). In doing this - grasping the meaning of an utterance - we not only register the appropriate sense of its content, but have also to grasp the value judgments that are inextricably bound up with that content. (in D'Costa, 1990:202f.)

Thus, according to Surin, philosophers or theologians of religions interested in issues of religious pluralism require 'an attentiveness to the apperceptive backgrounds

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relating the doctrines of each religions to their regulative functions. He illustrates his point (developed in Chapter 4 of his book) by the rule to 'Drive on the left' or 'Drive on the right', which are unequivocal in meaning and unequivocally opposed. Both find their meaning by specifying where they apply or where one takes priority over the other. So, the first makes sense in Britain and the second in the U.S.A.
The importance of Lindbeck's views for letting other religions define themselves is obvious: we have to examine how language, beliefs and doctrines are used contextually, not make assumptions from our perspective.

[305](1986) Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press. According to Surin, Voloshinov may be a pen name of Mikhail Bakhtin (in D'Costa, 1990:212fn23).

of the participants in such dialogues' (in D'Costa, 1990:203). He refers to an article by Talal Asad[306], who writes that:

> because the languages of Third World Societies... are weaker in relation to Western languages (and today, especially in English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries, Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages produce and deploy *desired* knowledge more readily than Third World languages do. (The knowledge that Third World languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in the same way, or for the same reason.) (Asad, 1993:190f.; quoted by Surin in D'Costa, 1990:205).

Elsewhere, Asad makes another pertinent point about Western misrepresentation of other cultures. He refers to a criticism made by Stephen Greenblatt of Daniel Lerner's book, The Passing of Traditional Society. According to Greenblatt, 'what Professor Lerner calls "empathy", Shakespeare calls "Iago"' (Greenblatt, 1980:225; Lerner, 1958:50; Asad, 1993:11). Greenblatt believed that 'the idea shared by Lerner's "empathy" and Shakespeare's Iago was *improvisation*' (Asad, 1993:11):

> What is essential is the Europeans' ability again and again to insinuate themselves into the preexisting political, religious, even psychic structures of the natives and to turn those structures to their advantage... Professor Lerner is right to insist that this ability is a characteristically (though not exclusively) Western mode, present to varying degrees in the classical and medieval world and greatly strengthened from the Renaissance onwards; he misleads only in insisting further that it is an act of

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[306] 'The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology', in Asad, 1993:171-199.

> imaginative generosity, a sympathetic appreciation of the other fellow. For when he speaks confidently of the "spread of empathy around the world," we must understand that he is speaking of the exercise of western power, power that is creative as well as destructive, but that is scarcely ever wholly disinterested or benign. (Greenblatt, 1980:227f.; quoted in Asad, 1993:12)

This analysis seems to cut the ground from under Western, Christian proponents of the emergence of a global consciousness, who would seek to interpret other faiths from within their own self-understanding as well as from a particular Christian perspective.[307]

Indeed, Robert Young's book, White Mythologies, subtitled 'Writing History and the West', argues that:

> colonialism... constitutes the dislocating term in the theory/history debate; from this perspective, theoretical and political questions are inflected towards the way in which theory and history, together with Marxism itself, have themselves been implicated in the long history of European colonialism - and, above all, the extent to which that history continues to determine both the institutional conditions of knowledge as well as the terms of contemporary institutional practices - practices which extend beyond the limits of the academic institution. (Young, 1990:vii)

Furthermore, and crucially, 'colonialism, in the British example, was not simply a marginal activity on the edges of English civilization, but fundamental in its own cultural self-representation' (Young, 1990:174). Thus, many British scholars have not only created a Third World in their own

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[307]Such criticisms could be extended to some Christians from a third world background, and people of other faiths who have had a Western education and pursue its assumptions and modes of discourse to the detriment of others. (cf Surin in D'Costa, 1990:203f.)

image, but have defined themselves in terms of that creation.[308] The forms of European thought need to be decolonised, and Young sees postmodernism as 'European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world' (Young, 1990:19).

Young's book, essentially a critique of Marxist theories of history, does not raise the question of religion as a major factor, not even negatively, and not even in his chapter on 'Disorienting Orientalism'. (Ironically, this may reflect his own particular Western perspective; it hardly reflects the importance of religion, for good or ill, in other parts of the globe.) Yet the implications of his analysis for Christian mission are clear: in a postmodern society which handles fragmentation more easily than unifying visions, and in a post- or neo-colonial setting, in which Christianity has been deeply involved in the Western practice of identifying 'the other' in order to have power over or to marginalise it, the end of colonialism has hardly dissolved the problems of Christianity's image in other parts of the world or made easier the task of offering Christ to others.

It is important to be aware of the criticisms of this Western enlightenment perspective on knowledge and power by Christians from other backgrounds, even if some of them have had the advantage (or otherwise) of a Western

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[308]The term 'Third World' dates from the 1955 Bandung Conference.

education. For example, Paulos Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Delhi and the North in the Malankara Orthodox Church, acknowledges that he has learned much from many sources: from other religions and from communists. He reserves most of his criticisms for secularised, Western Christianity. For example, he observes that:

> My major liberation in life has been from thinking that the Western way of thinking, with its specific categories and modalities is the only way to think and to know... I do not have to be a slave of the Western subject-object mode of thinking, and the logic of the excluded middle... This world which the secular mindset takes to be some kind of ultimate reality is neither real nor unreal, and should be taken seriously, but not so absolutely. (in Forward, 1995:forthcoming)

Reminiscing about the Christian ecumenical scene in the 1960s, Mar Gregorios comments that:

> I saw the damage done to the image and reality of the Christian Church by the unchristian attitude towards other religions fostered by reformed thinkers like Barth, Brunner and Kraemer. They were speaking out of their cultural parochialism rather than from any genuine Christian insight, it seemed to me. (in Forward, 1995:forthcoming)

To be sure, many Western interpretations of religious diversity, to say the least, lack a necessary degree of awareness about the particularities from which they interpret the world.[309] Yet, despite the difficulties

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[309]To give one example, Surin observes that:

> all Hick's epicycles... rely on a Kantian-type distinction, crucial for him, between a *noumenal* transcendent focus common to all religions which Hick calls "the Real", and the culturally-conditioned and hence "culture-specific" *phenomenal* images which are a schematization or concretization of the Real...

attending the process whereby Western theologians seek to empathise with the 'other', there seems no alternative except to do so in the knowledge of the vast difficulties attendant upon the enterprise. Certainly, members of some other religions stake their claim to a superior knowledge of the truth, sometimes sharply. For example:

> The nineteenth-century Japanese Buddhist scholar Enryo Inoue remarked once: "It is neither because I favor Sakya-muni [Gautama the Buddha] nor because I am prejudiced against Jesus that I uphold Buddhism and reject Christianity. It is simply because I love truth and hate untruth." (DiNoia, 1992:109)

If truth is crucially important, as it is for many religious people, then it is vital to witness to it. Yet, in the context of the West's colonial history and Christianity's involvement in it, Western theologians of religions must recognise certain important facts. Among them include an awareness of the legacies of history that hang heavily over the Western theologian of religion, whatever his or her theological starting point. Then there is the need for an acknowledgment of the difficulties of

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> [Yet] Hick simply never raises the question of the possible distortive effects this appropriation of Kant might have on those religions which have Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Panjabi, Swahili, or Thai as the typical languages of their adherents. What if the societies which deploy these particular languages are not themselves able to accommodate this Kantian epistemology, or indeed epistemology *simpliciter*, (and this because such things as epistemologies are put in place and authorized by institutionalized forces which may or may not be present in a particular society)? (in D'Costa, 1990:119, 205f.)

cross-cultural discourse, specifically the problems that languages present for translating words and concepts that have no easily identifiable point of contact with 'the other'.

The means and goal of mission also need careful consideration, given that many non-Westerners are unimpressed by Western values,[310] with which the European and American Churches are identified by many. Here, the witness of Mar Gregorios about his own, Eastern, Christian faith might point a way forward for adherents of the Western traditions:

> I have learned much from the Eastern Orthodox heritage: that Eucharistic worship and adoration with thanksgiving are the primary responses to what God has done in Christ - not preaching or witnessing... I am privileged to be initiated, by baptism-chrismation, into the great mystery of the universe as God guides it to its destiny. (in Forward, 1995:forthcoming)

It would also seem crucial that any commitment to the idea of an emerging global consciousness ought not to be given an ideological slant which imposes a Western totalitarian ideology upon other cultures, even or, indeed, especially one masquerading as Christianity or the Christian gospel. Furthermore, it should recognise the fact of other micro rather than macro factors, including the 'localized spaces' to which Surin refers. Just as pluralism can refer

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[310] 'The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him': Frantz Fanon, quoted in Young, 1990:124.

descriptively to the wide variety of religions and ideologies in the contemporary world, and need not bear the freight of an interpretation which assumes that diversity is inherently desirable in a variety of ways, so proponents of a global consciousness might best interpret it as the recognition that, in a world of scholarship dominated by information technology, the English language and so forth, questions about appropriate modes of engagement and understanding need to be seriously addressed.[311]

Yet Western Christians can gratefully recognise that there have been enlightened missionaries and pioneers of earlier days, who treasured 'otherness', but related it to Christ. The great C.F. Andrews, the beloved friend of Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, towards the end of his life said that 'what was dimly seen before by seers and *rishis* of old time is fully revealed in Christ' (Tinker, 1979:300). The debate needs to be continued and developed about how, for a Christian, faithfulness to Christ can be held in creative dialogue with letting 'the other' really be other, and, if soteriology is not the appropriate mode of discourse, what might replace it.

Such faithfulness could also include letting 'the other' challenge cherished convictions about Christian faith. For

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[311]Admittedly, even this begs a number of questions: including, for example, whether international inter-religious conferences merely perpetuate a Western mode of knowledge, by bringing together Europeans, Americans, and those from other parts of the world who have had a Western education.

example, a recognition that soteriology is not the primary concern of other faiths might lead Christians to question its position in their own faith. If a precondition of satisfactory conversation with another is mutual respect and a willingness to let the other define his or her beliefs, then a result might be to be transformed by the other's perspective. This need not lead to faithlessness, but rather to refocussing or restating the central claims of Christian faith so that they are relevant to the contemporary world.

One avenue of exploration is being ventured by those who have wrestled existentially with facts of religious pluralism. Scholars who have married spouses from other cultures or religions are beginning to reflect on the implications of this for multiple religious identity, asking how beliefs and practices of 'the other' can faithfully be integrated into the religion of their birth.[312] Other scholars, such as Diana Eck, have had a profoundly empathetic symbiosis with another faith (in a more positive sense than empathy is interpreted by Asad and Greenblatt), and so feel its claims upon the integration of their own religious beliefs and practices.

Parrinder has not displayed much interest in the difficulties which a post-imperial context presents for

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[312]See the rather different contributions to this debate in Forward, 1995 (forthcoming) by John Berthrong ('A Confucian-Christian') and Julius Lipner ('A Oneness to Behold').

Christian mission.[313] Yet his conviction that Jesus Christ is a superlatively attractive moral teacher[314] is a point still worth pondering by Christian missiologists. Moreover, Parrinder's sympathetic appreciation and comparison of aspects of other faiths from a Christian theological perspective have helped lay the groundwork for this imaginative envisioning of faithful living in a religiously plural world. In order to illustrate his pivotal and foundation-laying role, it is instructive to compare him with two scholars, his exact contemporary Lesslie Newbigin (b.1909), and Diana Eck, almost two generations younger (b.1945).

8.4 Parrinder and Lesslie Newbigin.

Newbigin first arrived in India in 1936. He attended the Tambaram Conference in 1938. He was much involved in the later stages of the creation of the Church of South India; he became Bishop in Madurai and Ramnad when church union was realised in 1947. Madurai is one of Hindu India's holiest cities. He left India in 1959 to work for the International Missionary Council and then the World Council of Churches, but returned from 1965 to 1974 as Bishop of Madras.

Newbigin's response to other religions has been very different from Parrinder's. Writing about his time in

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[313]See, however, Chapter 3.3.

[314]See section 2 of this chapter.

Madras, he referred to C.N. Annadurai, who was appointed Chief Minister of the state of Tamil Nadu in May 1967:

> His party [the DMK] was held together not by a political programme but by devotion to the Tamil language and culture. Their approach to government was pragmatic and populist and I found it congenial. For his part Annudurai was always friendly and ready to listen. Some of my Christian friends who were deeply loyal to Congress [the political party which, in one form or another, has governed India for most of the post-independence era] looked askance at the DMK because of its official commitment to atheism. I found this rather an asset than a liability, since the gods whose existence they denied were, in my Christian understanding, no gods. Annadurai's real beliefs were well expressed when, at my invitation, he addressed a big congregation in the cathedral during a memorial service for Martin Luther King and spoke of him as 'truly a servant of God'. (Newbigin, 1985:217f.)

Self-confessedly, Newbigin prefers atheism to a religious alternative to Christianity. However, his comment about Hindu gods shows no deep insight into how Hindus conceptualise reality, despite his many years in India. Clearly, Newbigin's view of truth reflects the Calvinism of his Presbyterian roots, far removed from Parrinder's Arminian heritage. A recent appreciation of Newbigin by Martin Conway profiles his 'faith pilgrimage' (Conway, 1994:27). Newbigin's has been a journey in which his Christian map and compass have provided him with such detailed guidance through the terrain of other cultures and religions that he has not paused to reflect appreciatively upon the sights.

His strengths are illustrated by his early book, A South India Diary (1951), based on circular letters he sent to England from India. This book reveals him to be a pastor

and a teacher, rather than someone who engages critically but creatively with 'otherness'. Indeed, the worlds of Hinduism rarely obtrude on his narrative, and when they do, never so that he expresses an appreciation of them. In one place, he condemns monism as thoroughly as Parrinder. He notes:

> the immense and all-pervasive influence of the Vedanta philosophy, an influence which colours all thinking in this country. The absolute monism of the Vedanta destroys in advance all claims on behalf of any religion for the allegiance of all men. To those who are under the influence of the Vedanta, Christian evangelism is an intolerable assertion of ultimate truth on behalf of one among the many forms of illusion. (Newbigin, 1951:58f.)

Yet, given Gandhi's popularity and influence in India then, and his commitment to a theistic interpretation of Indian religion, Newbigin overstates his case that monism 'colours all thinking in this country'.

It is significant that, except for a small reference in the preface, where he claims 'a long involvement with the world of Hinduism' (Newbigin, 1982:viiff.,), Newbigin's commentary on John's gospel betrays no influence from his Indian years, even though the thought-forms of that work strike deep resonances among many Hindus. Indeed, in 1939 C.F. Andrews recalled how the mentor of his early years, B.F. Westcott, Bishop of Durham, (who had written a commentary on the Johannine epistles, published in 1892), in his old age:

> 'like an ancient seer, with a vision of the future before his eyes' had prophesied that 'the intellectual

> and spiritual appreciation of ... (St John's Gospel) would come most fully and richly at last from great Indian Christian thinkers when they had gone far beyond the period of tutelage from the West, and had learnt to think for themselves on these profound subjects'. (O'Connor, 1990:302)

Newbigin's commentary is not such a work; it could have been written by a Barthian who had never set foot outside Europe.[315] In his sermon preached at the 50th anniversary service of the Tambaram Conference, he recalled his 'revered and beloved friends', Kraemer and A.C. Hogg. Hogg, principal of Madras Christian College, had resisted Kraemer's interpretation of the Christian message in a non-Christian world, but Newbigin commented that as the years go by 'I find myself more and more compelled to stand with Kraemer' (in Stockwell, 1988:328).

Indeed, the teaching of Karl Barth, as interpreted by Hendrik Kraemer, has provided the starting point for his

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[315]Indeed, Newbigin's commentary is Barthian, or perhaps Kraemerian, in its insights and limitations. Commenting on John 1:9, Newbigin has written that 'it has often been suggested that this inner illumination is to be identified with the various religions of mankind. Nothing in the text suggests this' (Newbigin, 1982:6). He also gives a Kraemerian interpretation of John 14:6:

> We do not come to the true knowledge of God by any kind of induction from human experience, even human religious experience. In face of the fact of death that enterprise is doomed in advance. We come to the true knowledge of God by knowing Jesus, and following him along the way which he goes and which he is. (Newbigin, 1982:182)

This is not the only way to interpret the evidence. A very different, inclusive, interpretation of Johannine christology is offered in Cracknell, 1986:69-109.

theological reflections about faith and culture. Newbigin reminisced that:

> for those of us who lived through those days [of the Tambaram Conference] it is hard to communicate to others the sheer liberation that this simple message [that 'the gospel is unique, sovereign, unbound'] brought... We were part of the great confusion, the great betrayal, which had bracketed the gospel with all sorts of causes and interests, above all the betrayal that had led to two world wars between so-called Christian nations... (in Stockwell, 1988:327f.)

In recent works and through the influence of the British-based 'Gospel and Our Culture' movement, Newbigin has sought to uncover and criticise the West's commitment to enlightenment reason, which in his view fosters an ideological pluralism in which facts are to be divided from beliefs (Newbigin, 1989:14-38). He has explored the implications of:

> [Kraemer's] deepest concern [which] was for the integrity of the Christian message, for its sovereign freedom, and therefore for its sharp separation from the contemporary confusion between the gospel and the values of western civilization. (in Stockwell, 1988:328)

Although he has some pertinent points to make, Newbigin's writings suffer from a number of imbalances. The pluralism he condemns is much more pluralist than he admits: the 'Gospel and Our Culture' movement has recently changed its name to 'Gospel and Culture', as though the two were monoliths, distinct and mutually antagonistic. There is also, ironically, a culturally-conditioned feel to this oversimplified dichotomy between faith and culture, applied universally. Despite his serious reservations about Western

enlightenment philosophy, because it relegates religion to private belief, and exalts 'the public world of "facts" which are [in enlightenment philosophy's estimation] true "objectively" and can be known to be so by methods of modern science' (in Wainwright, 1989:318), he has not provided or encouraged a mode of intellectual discourse which would or could hear how other faiths and cultures interpret and express their deepest concerns.[316] Indeed, ironically, Newbigin permits the gospel an uncritical sway over other interpretations of reality which he condemns in enlightenment pluralism.

Christopher Duraisingh, then co-ordinator of the World Council of Churches' Programme Unit on Churches in Mission, in his foreword to Newbigin's The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, ventured the criticism that:

> In the early chapters Newbigin analyzes the roots of the present crisis of Christian confidence. Much of what he says in these chapters, set within a theoretical and epistemological framework..., has a clear Western orientation and may well prove to be controversial. (in Newbigin, 1989:viii)

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[316]Kenneth Surin points to Bernard McGrane's contention that in the early 20th century the dominant paradigm for representing the difference between the European and the non-European became culture:

> As McGrane puts it: "We think under the hegemony of the ethnological response to the alienness of the Other; we are, today, contained within an anthropological concept of the Other. Anthropology has become our modern way of seeing the Other as, fundamentally and merely, cultural difference". (Surin in D'Costa, 1990:198; quoting McGrane, 1989:x)

Thus, Newbigin's emphasis upon culture could be interpreted as a Western perspective, which is locked into a discourse based on power over other 'cultures'.

Unlike Newbigin, Parrinder has not been involved in ecclesiastical or Christian ecumenical hierarchies. It is regrettable that he has not been included in the ecumenical debates about inter-faith matters in the last thirty years. His interest in that area dates back to his first published article, where he attacked Kraemer's views. He would have articulated other views than those which Newbigin has promulgated. Unlike Newbigin, he has taught students in a secular university. He has thus realised the massive irrelevance of the churches, though not religion, to many of them. Parrinder has also discerned that living in the contemporary world demands an openness to its diversity, and a willingness to interpret Christ and other aspects of Christian faith in the light of the beliefs of others. In practice, this is far removed from Newbigin's position.

It is particularly inappropriate that the *Epworth Review* (a Methodist journal) in its 'Profile' series should have portrayed Newbigin in the edition before it fêted Parrinder. For Methodists, Parrinder's theology and especially his informed and sympathetic knowledge of other faiths, based upon Methodism's Arminian roots, should take priority over Newbigin's Calvinist theology.

8.5 Parrinder and Diana Eck.

Diana Eck is Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University. Her first book, a study of Banaras, Kashi or Varanasi, eschewed comparison. It concentrated on the historical and sacred importance of the

city for Hinduism. She also mentioned the importance of Sarnath, close by Banaras, to Buddhists as the Deer Park where the newly awakened Buddha preached his first sermon. Moreover, she recorded the importance of the city to Jainas, because it is counted among the sacred *tirthas* (ford; place of pilgrimage) where two *jinas* were born (Eck, 1983:56f.). Yet hers is basically a study of Hinduism. In describing the perspective from which she wrote, she recorded that:

> This book is a study and interpretation of Banaras from the standpoint of one who is close enough to the Hindu tradition to see its religious significance and close enough to Western religious and academic traditions to know the problems of understanding that Banaras and the Hindu tradition it represents might pose. My work is based on two primary sources: a voluminous literature of Sanskrit texts which describe and praise Banaras, and the city itself, with its patterns of temples, its seasons of pilgrimage, and its priestly and lay interpreters. It is a study of "text and context", or perhaps more accurately, of classical Sanskrit texts and the "text" of the city, brought together so that we may see this city and understand its sacred structure and meaning as it has been seen and understood by Hindus. (Eck, 1983:xiiif)

Eck has attempted to scan a different universe of meaning through the other's eyes, and interpret it to outsiders:

> It is a city of wealth, exuberance, and life. It is also a city of poverty, confusion, suffering, and death. But the City of Light, they say, extends one's vision across the river of life and death to the far shore of immortality. "It is called Kashi, for here the light shines." (Eck, 1983:344)

The book is an evocative description of a holy city, a combination of history, sociology, and religious power located in one place. Its pages conjure up a world of

spiritual import and human aspiration. In order to demonstrate its empathetic description of Banaras's religious importance, it is instructive to compare Eck's book with Parrinder's Religion in an African City. His inductive approach and missionary interests led him to overemphasise the importance of Christianity in Ibadan, and play down the significance of Islam there.[317] Eck does not come at the evidence with a Christian agenda. She rarely mentions Christianity, and, when she does so, is candid about the failure of missionaries to achieve their goal:

> To their credit... the missionaries recognized the great power and significance of Banaras for Hindus. For this reason they poured their energies into the conversion of Banaras, convinced that if only Banaras could be won for Christianity the tide would surely... turn throughout India... [Yet] when the brahmins of Banaras went forth, it would be to the West, and they would teach Indian music, Vedanta philosophy, Ayurvedic medicine, Hindu meditation and yogic exercises to the many millions in Europe and America who would appreciate their message. (Eck, 1983:92f.)

Ten years on, she published Encountering God; a very different book, though equally full of insights. Its subtitle is 'A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras'. This indicates a willingness by Eck to reflect in an overtly biographical and Christian way upon her pilgrimage between the two places, symbolising two universes of meaning.

Her Christian reflections upon other faiths are different from Parrinder's in a number of ways. Eck has thoroughly

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[317]See Chapter 6.2.

learned and entered into Hindu beliefs and practices before reflecting upon their significance for her own Christian faith. She has not, as Parrinder sometimes has, applied her Christian faith as the main tool by which to interpret what she sees, in advance of experiencing the 'other'.

This has led Eck to an imaginative revisioning of certain common themes. She grew up as a Methodist in a small town in Montana, close by a river:

> Today these two places, Bozeman and Banaras, both convey the spiritual meaning of the word *home* to me. And these two rivers, the Gallatin and the Ganges, both flow with living waters I would call holy. Worlds apart, they carry currents of life and meaning whose confluence is in me, deep in my own spiritual life. (Eck, 1993:1f.)

She went on to write that 'All of us have such rivers deep within us, bearing the waters of joining streams', but, if so, only a few have had the imaginative power to recognise this and describe them as she has. In eight chapters, she discusses: 'Bozeman to Banaras'; 'Frontiers of Encounter'; 'The Names of God'; 'The Faces of God'; 'The Breath of God'; 'Attention to God'; '"Is Our God Listening?"'; and, 'The Imagined Community'.

This book is not without faults. The themes seem like a series of loosely conjoined articles, rather than the subject of a book. Outside her specific interest in Hinduism, her knowledge of other religions is far less wide than Parrinder's. For example, her comment that a taxi driver who showed her the tomb of Jesus in Kashmir 'knew

the story... as a Muslim' (Eck, 1993:113) is contentious, since Muslims regard Ahmadiyyas, who hold such a view, as members of a heterodox and un-Islamic group.

Yet the juxtaposition of her Hindu and Christian self is often luminously moving and suggestive. She describes seeing the dead body of her brother, who was beaten to death in a jail. For her, it was not just the Holy Spirit who made sense of this event, but Mother Kali, who at first had repulsed her but who 'challenged me to be open to the presence and power of God in places where it is uncomfortable to be':

> Is the Holy Spirit present only in life and absent in death? Present only in peaceful death, and absent in violent or untimely death? These are the questions that the formidable Kali poses as she stands there in her skulls. (Eck, 1993:142)

Eck does not make it clear how far it might be possible to be both Christian and Hindu. She is 'someone who never had a formal theological education' (Eck, 1993:xiv). This is not wholly disadvantageous, since often it frees her to explain her experiences in a refreshingly unhackneyed way. Yet a deeper knowledge of Christian systematic theology might have helped her formulate an appropriate model or models of 'multiple religious identity'. Nevertheless, some of her stories are enormously evocative, capable of transforming perceptions about one's own religion, even when they arise out of a wholly different presupposition about human nature and destiny:

> a Hindu friend of mine once said to me, standing on the ghats in Banaras, looking down at the cremation ground, "You people think that death is the opposite of life, but we think of death as the opposite of birth." In the Hindu view, the soul's pilgrimage is a long one, and we are born time and time again. (Eck, 1993:114)

More often than not, she indicates that there are things in Hinduism which, as a Christian, she cannot know. It may very well be that where people inhabit a context of multiple religious participation, as happens in India and China, one faith provides the focus for understanding and integrating religious faith and practice. Eck's pilgrimage might be counted, by theologians, as a Christian's devout attempt to live faithfully in the contemporary world rather than to participate in a world which does not reflect her experience. Yet it may portend more: a future in which people nourish and revive their understanding of and relationship to transcendent reality by empathetic engagement with other ways of envisioning and responding to the claims of ultimate reality.

This is very different from Parrinder's knowledge of Hinduism as interpreted in christological categories. The difference may be in part due to the fact that Eck is almost two generations younger than Parrinder and has worked outside a colonial context.

There is one other important difference. Eck notes that 'for fifteen years I was on the WCC Working Group on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and for eight of those years chaired that group as moderator' (Eck,

1993:ix). Thus she has regularly been able to converse with other Christians involved in dialogue, including all shades of opinion. We have already noted that Parrinder has never had that kind of international church experience. Indeed, for most of his working life, the WCC echoed the views of Kraemer and his followers.

Parrinder's was one of the few voices to urge the church to realise the fact of religious pluralism, as in The Christian Debate. One speculates how his works might have been refined or even, in certain cases, been significantly altered if he had had Eck's or Newbigin's opportunities to play a more international role in the churches' relations to the wider ecumenism.

Conclusion

Geoffrey Parrinder's life and career, summarised in Chapter 1, show him to be among the last scholars of religion whose training and careers were formed within the edifice of empire. In recent years, the dark recesses of imperialism have been much explored, and the work of many of those who worked under British rule has been marginalised or even dismissed.[318]

Yet Chapter 2 reveals that his Methodist faith is capable of discerning insights elsewhere in the world of religions, more so than the Calvinism of other far more influential Protestant theologians, such as Barth and Kraemer. Even so, the context of empire, within which he worked in Africa, probably encouraged even far-sighted and liberal Western intellectuals like Parrinder to attempt feats of scholarship which, to younger scholars, seem over-ambitious. Nowadays, it would be hard to justify writing about such a wide range of religions and aspects of faith as Parrinder has done. Perhaps the far-reaching scope of his works is also due to the British tradition of empiricism, which often prefers the accumulation of facts about a wide range of subjects to the exploration of ideas. This tradition may also be responsible for Parrinder's lack of interest in methodology, discussed in Chapter 3.

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[318]The attitude towards Parrinder of many recent African scholars of primal faith is an example: Chapter 4.3.

Furthermore, the lack of supervision for his university degrees could explain a certain want of boundaries to, or analytic sensitivity in, his writings, as well as a preference for narrative rather than ideas.

Chapter 3 also reveals that it is notable that Parrinder has largely taken the contexts in which he found himself for granted. His writings do not display much concern for issues of political, economic or social justice, even though these have exercised many other scholars during the twilight years of empire and the post-colonial context. Neither, however, has he been associated with working for the perpetuation of Western rule or influence, as other scholars have been.[319]

Yet the fact of the British Empire was not wholly negative. It provided some scholars of religion with the opportunity of spending many years living among people of different faiths and cultures. Parrinder's missionary period in Dahomey and Côte d'Ivoire, and then his teaching years in Nigeria, gave him the opportunity to observe at first-hand and over a long period people whose life and faith had not been adequately recorded by any previous Western scholar. He is thus to be contrasted with many anthropologists and scholars of religion whose work was done primarily or wholly in libraries and studies.

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[319]For example, R.C. Zaehner's work as a spy for the British in Iran is mentioned in Chapter 3.3.

Parrinder's two decades in West Africa enabled him to formulate his interpretation of African Traditional Religion, described in Chapter 4. Indeed, his description of a sub-Saharan African primal faith, differing in many details from area to area, but having certain common themes, described in his fourfold classification and interpreted in the light of Placide Tempels' belief in a hierarchy of powers, has been a major contribution to the study of religion. Whatever criticisms can be made of it, or however much his legacy has been ignored or underestimated by African (and some other) scholars, all who have subsequently written in the field of African primal faith are deeply indebted to his substantial work.

Parrinder's extended contact with different cultures and religions in West Africa is much less possible for western scholars these days.[320] There are many fewer missionaries. Field workers and academics very often only make relatively short visits to countries in which they are interested for their research. It is doubtful whether many short visits would prove as valuable as an extended stay in one place. Parrinder himself illustrates this fact. His work on African religions is immeasurably more interesting and important than that on Indian faiths, which is largely to be explained by his deep knowledge of West Africa as contrasted to his brief visits to South Asia.

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[320]It is not impossible for adventurous scholars, as the career of Diana Eck (though in India, not Africa) illustrates: Chapter 8.5.

The lack of a long immersion in another culture may partly explain the relatively un-nuanced approaches of some younger scholars of anthropology and Religious Studies: for example, Rosalind Shaw and Rosalind Hackett, writing about African primal faiths and new religious movements, display viewpoints that are at least as limited as, though wholly different to, Parrinder's theological interpretation.[321]

Parrinder's interpretation of Christian organisation, worship, beliefs and practices, outlined in Chapter 5, shows how rooted he has been in his own religion, and what it can offer, yet also how it must adapt, to African culture. Some of the issues he first raised there, he has reiterated in later life and in the different context of western secularism. He has, for example, retained a particular interest in the wide ramifications of human sexuality. Although he has written many wise things, his discussion lacks a certain flair and insight, and reflects his liberal, middle-class origins.

Both Chapter 6, on Islam and Judaism, and Chapter 7, on Indian religions, show his wide reading, yet do not convince the reader that he has any profound empathy with his subjects. Clearly, African primal religion fired Parrinder's imagination and interpretative powers; less so, other religions whose beliefs he has most helpfully described in his many works.

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[321]See Chapters 4.3, 4.4, and 5.2.

Many contemporary theologians of religious pluralism, recounted in Chapter 8, refract all they have seen and read through the prism of a Christian point of view, albeit a far more narrow one. Parrinder's theology is not profound, but its rootedness in his Methodist origins, emphasising universal sin but also universal grace, has encouraged and justified his genuine yet critical interest in and affirmation of the beliefs and practices of other faiths. Although his description of Indian religions interprets them too readily from a Christian universe of meaning, his deep, existential knowledge of other faiths gives credibility to his Christian interpretations.

More work needs to be done in this area of rejoicing in and valuing the 'otherness' of different faiths, whilst affirming the truths of one's own religion. Clearly, it is not enough simply to live among people of other faiths: Newbigin has learned little about other religions from his many years in India. The theology scholars learn early in life also counts for much, as does their willingness (or disinclination) to test it against the claims of other people of faith during the course of their ongoing experiences of religious pluralism.

Has Parrinder made any contribution to an emerging global consciousness? In the symposium for Parrinder's seventieth birthday, Andrew Walls bestowed on him the African praise-name *izibongo*, 'a Bag of Needments' (in King and Walls, 1980:142, 149). It remains an acute as well as a witty

designation. Walls' noted that Parrinder has 'produced "a bag of needments": a collection of domestic necessities, in portable form, for the road'. In other words, Parrinder's works provide much useful information in accessible form. He may not offer a profound and challengingly novel vision of reality for spiritual pilgrims at the end of the twentieth century. Yet his appreciative work on other faiths, written in a popular style for a wide audience, provides material upon which others can construct more imaginative inter-religious engagements than he has attempted.

This dissertation raises the possibility that it would be desirable to resurrect the achievements of other scholars of Religious Studies. One of Parrinder's mentors, Edwin Smith, is presently the subject of research for an M.Phil at Lancaster University.[322] It might also be profitable to explore the writings of E.O. James, although his works seem more dated and his insights less valuable.

It would seem more essential to uncover the achievements of James' great contemporary, Alan Coates Bouquet (b.1884). He was Lecturer in the History and Comparative Study of Religions in the University of Cambridge from 1932 until 1955. He looked at other faiths through the eyes of a Christian theologian, a more sophisticated one than Parrinder. His seminal work was called The Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions, (1958). His key to unlock the

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[322]The student is a Methodist minister, John Young.

mysteries of other faiths was the doctrine of the *logos*[323] (Bouquet,1958:137-165). His theology was subtle and remains worthy of serious reflection.

Indeed, exponents of the possibility of multiple religious identity could find a point of departure for their convictions in his theology.[324] Bouquet, using the Cambridge Platonists of the 17th century as an analogy, wrote that:

> at some time in the future it might not be improper for believers to exist who call themselves Christian Buddhists, or Christian Confucians, and even perhaps Christian Vedantists or Christian Moslems, without in the least abating their adherence to the Catholic Faith, and while paying a respectful tribute to the religious insights of their forefathers, and to their enlightenment by the One Logos. (Bouquet, 1958:424)

Parrinder's remembrances of his mother's friend Katie Hunt, who absorbed Buddhism into her Christianity, could have provided the point of departure for an exploration of multiple religious identity upon which he never embarked.[325]

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[323]So indeed was Parrinder's: Chapter 2.6. Parrinder, however, learned his *logos* christology elsewhere, though he knew of Bouquet's application of it (Parrinder, 1976b:48, where he alludes to Bouquet, 1958:160). Both he and Bouquet quote Archbishop William Temple's commentary on the fourth gospel, John 1:9, first published in 1939. ['By the Word of God - that is to say, by Jesus Christ - Isaiah, and Plato, and Zoroaster, and Buddha, and Confucius conceived and uttered such truths as they declared' (Temple, 1968:9).] Yet Bouquet saw more clearly than Parrinder that Temple did not always practise the tolerance he preached (Bouquet, 1958:410).

[324]On the matter of multiple religious identity, see Chapter 8.4 and 8.5.

[325]Interview on 6/7/90; and see Chapter 1.1.

The recovery of the views and insights of Bouquet and other scholars would not diminish the importance of Parrinder's achievements. For fifty years his contribution has been a significant one. It is possible and may even be desirable at the end of the twentieth century to prefer Eck's more empathetic response to religious pluralism, which first lets a religion speak for itself before too hastily imposing Christian meanings upon it. Yet such an approach still requires as its foundation the copious information about other faiths, written clearly and with sympathy and great enthusiasm, which Parrinder's work offers. Moreover, his more avowedly Christian interpretation of other faiths than Eck's has its considerable strengths: the perspective of his openly Christian faith has encouraged some to read his books who might otherwise have hesitated to do so. As a communicator of other faiths to English-speaking Christians, and others, through the translations into many languages of some of his works, Parrinder has had few peers and no superiors.

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